THREE ASSES IN BOLIVIA

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THREE ASSES IN BOLIVIA

La Paz: Monte Illemani in the Background

THREE ASSES IN BOLIVIA

BY

LIONEL PORTMAN

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TO

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE

'HALVES'

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I

We three, Roger Martin, Cecil Martin and I, all asses according to our friends, agreed to go chasing rainbows in Bolivia. Which of us was the greatest ass appears to have been a matter of debate among those friends; Roger and Cecil being in much request elsewhere as mining engineers, and I standing to gain little and lose much by long absence from home. From the first, however, these two seem to have had no doubt as to my precedence; and they deputed to me as the Chief Ass the task of keeping the log. My consent to do so may appear to lend some weight to their contention; but, as I did not fail to remind them, even an Ass is apt to gain more credence than a mining engineer; and if either of them had kept it he would but have anticipated the epitaph inevitably awaiting him—"Who hath believed our report?"

If you inform the next man, whoever he may be, that you are going to Bolivia you will probably see him grow thoughtful, uneasy, anxious as though for your state of mind, and will hear him murmur "Bolivia—Bolivia—let me see: one of the Southern States, isn't it? No, no, of course, Central America. No, I know, close to the Canal." And when you have persuaded him that it is not in Central America, and that it is not the same as Bolivar—a town and province of Venezuela, several hundred miles from Panama—but that it is a country all to itself, covering some 600,000 square miles, and is south of the Equator, north of the Argentine, west of Brazil and

east of Chile and Peru, you will probably be asked: "But what do you get there? I mean besides earthquakes and revolutions and that sort of thing? What is it—tarpon, llama, president, mountain-sheep—what?"

The answer is that you get none of these things except the llama, which ranks with the domestic fowl as an object of pursuit. Earthquakes have hardly ever been known to visit Bolivia; they prefer to frequent the line of 'faults' or terrestrial weaknesses which extends all the way from Cape Horn to Alaska. (This line, by the way, passes through Valparaiso, making it a very uncertain place to live in; sometimes it is there, sometimes it is not.) Revolutions are rare, and when they do come they are very mild and limited affairs. Tarpon, if they ever strayed so far inland, would find life almost as difficult in Bolivia as it has been for the average citizen in England since the war; for the rivers are apt to be bone-dry half the year and raging torrents the remainder. Presidents appear to be protected by the game laws; I never could make out why; at any rate they are seldom shot at. Mountain-sheep do not exist. Nor, taking the country as a whole and speaking broadly, are there any other animals worth pursuing except a few deer, the Bolivian Andes being singularly devoid of animal life. What you do 'get' among them is a wealth and variety of minerals such as few countries in the world can show. As the veins of a man are full of blood, so are the veins of Bolivia full of metal: of gold and lead and wolfram and antimony and bismuth, but, far more important, of tin and silver. Fabulous wealth has come out of them ever since the days of the Incas, and before them. Fabulous wealth is still coming.

And far more fabulous, it is certain, will come in the future, when science and money have had their say and the whole country has been made to give up its secrets. The huge mines now existing are but a fraction of what might exist. Only capital and spirit are needed to multiply them. The pity is that this capital and this spirit come as a rule from America and Chile rather than from England. Very little has ever been done by our people to acquire and develop Bolivian mining property, and still less in proportion is being done to-day. Ignorance of the country and lack of confidence in it are the rule rather than the exception with us; and by degrees all the wealth that might be ours is slipping away to people of other races. A fact which fills the beholder with dismay. For what, after all, is our first duty as a nation if it is not to take early and, where necessary, forcible possession of every corner of the earth that other people are likely to want? Duty! It is our faith, our destiny, our religion. And one does not like to see duty neglected and faith grow cold. It was, then, with the idea of helping in the performance of this duty and of keeping this faith alive, but also and more especially with that of helping themselves and keeping themselves alive, that the Three Asses set forth.

The first question before them was how to get to Bolivia. Roger, who had spent some fifteen years there in his time and was admitted to be an authority on the subject, plumped for Antofogasta via the Panama Canal, and thence by rail to Oruro, the town which was to be our headquarters: nothing simpler for him. But Cecil and I knew our man. We knew that the body and instincts of a wild animal are his; that from his monstrous and impermeable

frame all sickness and fatigues fly back as though from a spring-buffer; that in the matter of comfort and convenience the very savages know more and ask for more than he. Give him a chair, for example, he will balance on the edge of it as on a knife. Give him clothes, he will have them shapeless rags in a week. Give him wine, he will ask for water; a bed and a room, he will dream of spruce boughs under the stars. All foods are alike to him, all climates equal—except perhaps that luscious *menu* that he met in Labrador and has never forgotten, "Porpoise pie. Porpoise mince. Blueberries." How could we trust such a fellow to organise a journey tolerable to human beings?

We probed him with questions; and at last discovered that the town of Oruro lies nearer the sky than the sea—namely, 12,000 feet above the latter—and the climb thereto by rail is done so quickly, comparatively speaking, that only the angels who frequented Jacob's ladder or climbers of similar experience are likely to be free from *siroche* or mountain sickness.

"Of course if you mind *that* sort of thing," said Roger, but was not permitted to conclude.

"Could the journey be divided," we asked, "so that we could stop half-way up and get used to the altitude for a day or so?"

"Oh yes, people do," he sniffed. "But——"

No 'buts' were allowed. We tried to find out if there were any other charms of the route which he had not thought worth mentioning, but failed, and after some hesitation Cecil agreed to adopt it—with all risks.

For me, the Chief Ass, there was a graver problem,—namely, a wife. She could not go to Bolivia—far

too rough, even according to Roger. She could not be left at home: firstly, because I did not want to be away from her more than was absolutely necessary; and secondly—if you can believe it—because she did not want to be away from me. She must go, there seemed no doubt, to South America and there be dumped while I pursued my wanderings. But where? With whom? How should we find a suitable dump? Roger suggested Antofogasta—a town far nearer, I afterwards discovered, to the lower regions than Oruro is to the celestial. Cecil was for the Argentine—cooler, more people, more amusing. She herself had visions of Valparaiso. But in none of these places did we know a living soul. We had to sail at short notice, and so had little time to get introductions. How would she fare alone on those uncharted social seas?

She did not know; nor did we; and there were those who hinted that in certain conditions the wife of a Chief Ass might compete even with that Ass himself. But whatever their views she would not be deterred, and with a courage far excelling that of Columbus or Cabot decided to launch out upon the unknown main. In or about Buenos Aires we would endeavour to find a dump; and thence I would go by rail to the northern frontier of the Argentine, and so to Bolivia. Both I and the brothers Martin reckoned that we should be in Oruro within seven weeks. We appointed noon on Christmas Day as the hour of meeting and went our ways.

II

HAPPY the criminal booked for execution beside me booked for a voyage. Embarked, the boredom of all Time descends upon me; and I count the minutes till dry land appears. Nothing worse. Perhaps the worse might be better; it would at least be something to do. But at this a Half who certainly is not 'better' on the sea cries out at me in fury, "Brute! If you only knew your luck!" And she does know it, alas! none more surely; the reflections on the Sea of Glass will probably be too much for her. It was then, with deep foreboding on both sides, that we took ship at Liverpool—perhaps its initial was 'O' and perhaps it was not—and awaited the chastisement of Fate.

Far kinder was she, however, than we had dreamed to be possible. Here was November, but no November storms; the Irish Channel and the Bay, but both were calm as a bowl of milk. With blazing sun, crisp air and hardly a ripple on the sea we steamed for three days as though on an inland river: even the Half remained immune; and we were able in peace to walk the ship and see what of good and ill she had inherited from Eve.

She trembled, we found, as little as that lady herself—except when at odds with Adam. She took the sea with dignity, as befits a lady of 11,000 tons. She gave us good food, well varied, unpretentious and inviting; nor ever outside a village feast have I seen such solemn, earnest, calculat-

Sketch Map of South America

ing voracity as I saw—and shared—in the first week of that voyage. But alas for her liquors, what can be said for these? The tea was of that garden which only shipping companies know where to find. The coffee was worse. The wines and spirits were gall to the palate and outrage to the mind by their cost: and this, too, though the owners can buy duty-free in France, Spain, Portugal, all the wine-growing countries, and in Brazil where the gods go for their coffee. Even the drinking water was not above reproach. And at night we dreamed sometimes of pouring these liquids one by one down the throats of directors held flat upon the tables: but alas! when the morning came there were no directors, but only the same old tea.

There were other drawbacks of a minor but totally unnecessary kind. In our cabin, for example, a crevice built for three and just large enough to hold two, someone had taken the trouble to fill up with an unneeded and immovable chest of drawers the only space under one of the berths where a cabin trunk could be stowed. Here were we with, of course, two trunks and nowhere to put one of them. How, we wondered, could the Company afford to employ such gifted men? Then when we sought a big map on which to trace our progress, behold, there was none. And when we planned to go ashore anywhere there was little or no attempt to help us. Not only in France, Spain and Portugal, but also in the Canary Islands, Brazil, Uruguay, the Argentine, Chile, Peru, Panama, the West Indies, and even more countries than these, people land either temporarily or, if their sins be as scarlet, permanently. In all there are different and devilish

coinages. Why cannot the Company print a table of these coinages, with their approximate value in English money, and put them up for all to see? And why can they not take some steps to help passengers ashore without their being exposed to the jubilant robbery of the local boatmen? Alas, the answer to these things is 'no competition.' German shipping is dead for the moment and the English companies have the field all to themselves. One scarcely knows whether to be glad or sorry.

The calm lasted as far as La Rochelle, a busy French port in the centre of the Bay's periphery, where we stayed but a few hours, were not allowed to land and apparently missed nothing. Then arose Euroclydon or one of his relatives, and with him the Bay; with results first of doubt, then of suspicion, then of dire certainty in the minds of some. In only two did I happen to be interested; and of them only one—do I make myself clear? Even she in her darkest moments did not refrain from offering to the other such insults as, I regret to say, form part of her habitual attitude towards him; and I was led to conclude that either she was not so bad as usual, or else that the spirit in her is one that no man can hope to subdue. It was just *before* a climax that she spoke to me of the value of seasickness to certain figures.

Coruña we reached late in the evening and saw only its lights. Vigo we made next morning. And who that has come to Vigo in the morning can ever forget that splendid bay? You see the brown hills resting round it, guarding their treasury of pearl. You see the houses on their lower slopes, the cypresses and vines and fig-trees, the fields and

dark-frowning woods. You see the white town before you, rising tier upon tier up the hill, the ships and business of the harbour, brown sails and diamond ripple. You see the great spread of water stretching far out to the island rocks that guard the entrance: and still when you have seen all that you have not seen all Vigo. For far beyond the town the water winds inland among the mountains; you can follow it narrowing till the last dim flash is gone; and then your eye is carried on by these mountains, peak beyond peak, till they fade blue and cloud-like into the distance. The world can have few more wonderful scenes.

Apart from this view the Vigo of to-day has little attraction. We went ashore and wandered about for a few hours; saw some very lovely vineyards with decaying stone pergolas and leaves just turning crimson; smelled some very wonderful smells; and were deafened all the time by a tempest of noise. Which of the Spanish-speaking towns we visited on this trip was the most deafening it would be hard to say. All were terrific; and if there be any justice in heaven their inhabitants will be endowed with nerves in the next world, and thus equipped will be condemned to return and live for all time in their former haunts: no other punishment could fitly meet the crime. For the rest, the only feature that struck us here was the immense amount of building going on. All the ports in Spain were doing the same at that time, we were told; having prospered exceedingly during the war. And here at any rate they were building exceedingly well, with huge masses of stone brought as ever on the ox-cart of the country, slow and stately, with its solid wheels and still more solid oxen.

Leixoes, our next port of call, set us wondering as we came into it under the morning sun. What was that black mass on the beach that looked as if it might be a swarm of flies? Glasses showed that it was human; apparently the entire Portuguese nation drawn up in serried array. What for? Was there a revolution or an earthquake, or was it simply a religious ceremony? We guessed excitedly, and then were told prosaically. It was just a sardine-market; the obliging fish entering the bay in shoals at this time of year and leaving it—by a different route. We went ashore, well skinned as usual by our boatmen, and beheld the mass at close quarters; men, women and children working like ants. Some waded into the sea with nets and gathered the fish. Some, in couples, bore huge loads of them up the beach on their shoulders. Some weighed or bargained with the middleman. Some—and these were women—slashed away heads (and other things) and steeped the bodies in brine. Some—and these were not women—appeared to have no function except to chatter. There was colour, and bustle and talk, and smell that whistled into your ears and mouth as well as your nose: and certainly more work done than you would expect of the whole Portuguese nation in a year. The inrush of fish only lasts a few weeks, that is the reason; and so it must be harvested quickly if at all. It is the mainstay of great numbers of the people in winter; and as the source of so much food so easily obtained Leixoes naturally has high honour in the eyes of Portugal.

But what is this beside the honour it has, or should have, in the eyes of all the other nations of the world? For is it not the gateway, the harbour,

the Outer Court to that Holy of Holies, Oporto, the very shrine of Port? From Leixoes you go up by tram—oh, sacrilege!—to that celestial city; and from it the wine of heaven comes down by river to the harbour, and so away to the deserving and, alas, the undeserving too. As you are borne into that city you think with reverence what Port has meant to you and to all mankind; you feel as if shoes should be removed and obeisance made before you enter its holy precincts; and horror seizes you as you think of the blasphemers who would forbid the very act of worship. The very fires of Moloch were too cool for them.

As a matter of fact we should have fared very badly without our shoes, for here and there the shrine was exceedingly muddy. It is a beautiful town, not because its buildings are especially lovely, but because grouped one above another up a sudden hill the houses and churches and the fort give a grand effect of height and dignity such as one sees only in such 'hill towns' as Edinburgh. Here, too, is another requisite of big cities—namely, a river running between steep banks. What if its water be mainly red mud, you have but to think of what that mud is privileged to carry, and it becomes a rill as limpid as that of Parnassus. Yes, the shrine is worthy of its deity. But of course—so much so in fact as to be hardly worth mentioning—the one thing you cannot get here, as a stranger and pilgrim, is a drop of drinkable Port. No one, I suppose, but an Ass would have tried to get it. But I did; and was given a liquid new, crude, sweet, full of spirit, bestial to the tongue. I drank it, with bitterness in my heart. But there, what matter a moment later? I have been to Mecca; that is the

main thing. I have made the great pilgrimage; and hereafter shall be accounted a man nearer heaven than those who have not. My soul is in safe keeping. I ask nothing more of life.

At Lisbon we came in for fierce wind and rain, and the difficulty of going ashore was no light one. A few of us went and came back drenched, disgruntled and ready to depart. But there we had to stay yet another day; for the ship was short of water, and the lighters that should have brought it alongside were temporarily out of order. We got some, but not enough; and were told we should have to stop at Las Palmas for more. We did, and saw the place from the deck—which is said by some to be quite enough—a huge harbour in a ring of barren, sun-baked mountains; very fine, very hot, very bare. In the valleys there is rich tropical foliage, we were told, with flourishing corn-fields and vineyards and orange groves. But from the harbour nothing was visible but the scorched mountain-sides; and we wondered how the inhabitants made their living—those, that is, who were not engaged in making it out of us. All round the ship was a swarm of boats laden with oranges, lemons, grapes, vegetables, canaries, wicker chairs, baskets and tables, as also with puppies of some mongrel local breed: and throughout the four hours we were there the owners thereof never ceased to offer them for sale. Those of the population who were not thus busy on the top of the water spent incalculable periods beneath it diving for coins, including boys of ten or twelve years old: and we were driven to the conclusion that all the males of the islands are trained from the cradle to become human fish, this being the highest, and certainly

the most lucrative, ideal known to man. Whether they get degrees and diplomas for a certain time spent under water I do not know; but certainly no one from either University ever deserved more fully the title 'Master of Arts.'

III

'Brillig'

IV

WHENEVER during these ten days of liquidation or insolvency or whatever it may be politely called—whenever, I say, we murmured of the heat the wise would wag their heads at us in their wisdom, and look at each other privily and exclaim in derision; "Hot you call it? Hot! You just wait till we get to Rio." And then they would wag their heads again, and rejoice over us together, and be happier than any can expect to be who is not wise.

But behold, when we got to Rio the temperature was far lower than it had been since we left Las Palmas. And here let me note that from end to end of our trip, with a few brilliant exceptions, we were never given an opinion or forecast or statement of fact as to things on land or things on the sea; the wind, the sun, the moon, the stars, the climate; the life, the products of the country, the conditions of travelling; or any of the things which man born of woman may wish to know about South America which did not prove to be quite unreliable, if not wholly untrue. Were it not that one authority always differed from another, and both were usually wrong, we should have thought that a conspiracy was afoot to mislead us and send us back to Europe sadder and wiser. As it was, we developed a talent for drinking in all information as though it were liquid gold, and rejecting it on the instant as though it were rubbish. It was not always rubbish, but we were amazed to find how far and how

frequently men of experience could differ from each other—and from the truth.

Rio Harbour is, of course, one of the big things of the world. To look at it is to know what sea and mountains can be; and nothing short of looking will serve. At a glance you realise that it is much finer than Vigo; larger, more varied, more colour; higher, more abrupt and jagged hills. The distant mountains are more distant, more dramatic; the town far bigger, more imposing; the foliage a much more vivid green. But it is only after long gazing that you realise its size. Towns seem as villages upon its banks; big ships are dwarfs, islands but trifles. And far though the waters stretch within your sight, you know by the lie of the valleys that they wind yet farther among the hills, forming great creeks which it would take you days to explore, and washing the feet of towns and villages whose smoke alone you see. To go up each inlet, climb each hill, explore each hidden corner of the bay, that is what you want to do, and must do, to see Rio properly. But that would take a month; and a day is about all that most travellers can spare. To describe is sheer futility. You must go and see for yourself.

We at any rate had but one day to spare; and we could but hope, with the aid of the funicular, to climb one hill—namely, Corcovado. Even that under the circumstances was not quite so easy as it may sound. For the Half, alas, was little better than a Quarter now. All through the boiling heat of the tropics she had had bad influenza, days and nights of high temperature; and after that, of course, profound weakness. As though to make her recovery more impossible, we had had a following wind

nearly all the way, so that the scoop put through the port-hole to catch the breezes had caught none; and the air in our cabin was still the air of Las Palmas, we could almost tell to a second when each patch of it would come our way. In such conditions no one could hope to make any progress; and I ventured to doubt whether she would not be more dead than alive by the time she reached that hill-top. "Dead or alive," was the answer, "I am sick of this ship, and I go." Nothing more to be said. So down the companion-ladder we struggled amid a seething crowd. Into a steam-launch we were packed tight as cheese under the scorching sun. Five minutes we spent in that—at the price of five shillings a head. We landed; and almost immediately she had to be deposited on a chair in a shop, lest she deposit herself in a dead faint on the pavement. A promising start.

After a few minutes I was able to leave her, and set to work to find someone who in this town of Portuguese could speak a word of English, and tell me how to ascend Corcovado. The geography of the place being as strange to me as its language, I had little choice at first but to go about inquiring: "Donde el Cook?" (Where is Cook's office?) And it was some time before I discovered that that admirable (but in this case exasperating) person had never been heard of in Rio, nor I believe anywhere in South America. Then for some time I tried my few words of Spanish on various people without success, asking for someone who could speak 'Ingles'; but it was, I think, some two hours in all before I hit upon a majestic hotel porter who at any rate thought that he spoke French. He informed me that if I took a certain tram-car not later than one

o'clock we might just catch the last train that went up Corcovado that day. It was now twenty minutes to one. The Half was still in her shop, perhaps a mile, perhaps two miles, away. I took a car and fled back to fetch her. We caught the tram by inches, fussed ourselves to rags, missed lunch, and clanged for hours as it seemed through the deafening town, only to be told when we reached the funicular station that we had forty minutes to wait. Our first taste of South America.

What we saw, however, was worth many periods of forty minutes, not to mention noise, heat, hustle and hunger. Far above us rose the precipitous hill, a sheer wall of green, clothed with great trees, tangled with creepers, carpeted with ground plants, and oozing, one might almost say, steaming moisture out of the reeking soil—all the conditions, in fact, of a tremendous orchid-house. On the lower slopes—if slopes they could be called, which were almost perpendicular—houses large and small managed somehow to cling to the rock, seeming almost to stand on the top of each other, so steep was the incline. Each was buried in flowers; and each had a little garden full of vines, fig-trees, peaches, oranges, bananas, and always Indian corn and a few vegetables. Plants grow almost visibly in these conditions; but so, alas, does the jungle too; and we were told that it is almost an impossibility to maintain a garden at all, so swift and ceaseless is the encroachment of the forest.

At last the 'train,' which consisted of one carriage, started to groan up its pathway of cogs, and we could see at close quarters how precarious was the hold which both houses and gardens had on the hill-side. There were two or three stations on

the way; for this is a suburb of Rio, and such soil as there is is probably worth many hundred pounds an acre. Then we climbed away from the houses, and found ourselves in pure forest; now in a cutting, now on the side of a cliff; now on a skeleton bridge crossing a gorge at an angle of forty-five degrees with the horizontal and looking far down into depths of tropical jungle. Here and there a window seemed to open in the foliage, and we had glimpses of the town and harbour below, the wooded hills that come down to them and the vast expanse of ocean beyond. We passed two or three more stations, only one of which, close to a big hotel, seemed to have any reason for its existence; then, after some thirty-five minutes' journey in all, we were told that the train went no farther; there was a needle-shaped rock at the top which even the German engineer could not tackle—alas, the whole railway is German—and up this, if we wanted to see the view, we must walk.

This meant climbing about a hundred feet of stairs, no trifle for the Half, who was barely fit to do that distance on the flat. However, to my shame be it said, I proceeded to prove myself no fitter than she; for on leaving the train I found myself wobbling about like a drunken man, and only too glad of the support of some kindly railings. *Siroche*, thought I, at only about two thousand six hundred feet? Impossible! Yet I had had other symptoms on the way up: a split in my ears and a clamp across the top of my head. What else could it be? I was furious; for if I crumpled up thus contemptibly at this altitude how was I going to fare in Bolivia, the greater part of which lies at ten or twelve thousand feet? I could not imagine; and

I did not realise then, as I did later, the obvious fact that within limits it is the pace of a climb, not the height, that tells. Give your system time to adapt itself to the increased blood-pressure, and it will probably agree to any altitude within reason. Hustle it up on a funicular, and it may raise the most childish objections, as mine did. I soon snubbed it, and we struggled slowly to the top; but not without scathing—and for once unanswerable—comments on my condition from one to whom I was nominally to have been a crutch, a tower of strength and a rock of support. Arrived there we found, as might have been expected, a hideous open pavilion of glass and iron crowning the pinnacle of the hill. But in this we could sit for a time and drink in the view. Yes, and not only the superb view which we had seen from the ship, magnified and dignified ten thousand times by our height above it, but also several other views all equally sublime. No words can convey an idea of the grandeur of this scene: horizon beyond horizon of mountain and water, and tossed jungle, and foliage of dazzling green: as well try to put it all on canvas as on paper. We stayed there as long as the train would let us. Then down to the town again, feeling that we had had one of the most wonderful experiences of our lives; and so to our ship again, where the Half declared herself to be at least seven-sixteenths now, though for my part I would not have put her at more than three.

What else is there to say of Rio? Nothing probably that has not been said before. It is very large—extending for miles round the sea-coast as well as inland so far as the hills allow. Much of it is very beautiful—white houses amid exquisite

tropical flowers and foliage. All of it is maddeningly noisy—trams running along most of the by-streets however narrow, as well as the main, with ceaseless clanging of wheels and bells; and cars rushing everywhere at top speed, with deafening hooters and open cut-outs. It is abnormally expensive—we were told that if you play there at all regularly the cards alone, apart from any stakes, will run into £80 a year. It is also enormously rich — the proceeds of Brazilian coffee, sugar, cattle, tobacco, diamonds and rubber being largely concentrated here. It is strongly anti-German—evicted the Hun very early in the war from all his offices and business, and will not have him back: did he not sink a Brazilian ship? It is the town where Woman is kept in her proper place. When a man goes to his office in the morning, we were told, he usually turns the key on his wife for the day—which shows what he thinks of his fellow-men. It is comparatively healthy; some fever still, and occasionally small-pox; but nothing like what there used to be. It is a beautiful place to be away from.

If you want proof—just one story. During a great epidemic of fever the corpse-cart, on its daily round, was hailed aloud by a lady recently widowed.

"Hi!" she cried—I can only tell it in English—"Hi! I must have my husband taken away to-day. He has been here a whole week."

"Sorry," said the carter, glancing back at his load. "I really can't take him to-day. Too full already."

"But you must. A week. Think of it!"

"Sorry; if I took him he would only topple off. You can see, I haven't an inch to spare."

"But——"

"I tell you what I can do if you like. I can give you an exchange. Here," surveying his cart-load, "is one of only three days. I could let you have that—for a consideration."

She took it.

V

On the way to Buenos Aires we had evidence of the strong spirit of national revival which is said now to animate the Spanish race. In art, literature, commerce and industry alike they are reported to be making great progress, and certainly they show promise in diplomacy.

Among other pikes upon which we were impaled during this period by the Entertainments Committee, that Terror of the Deep, was a book-tea, or book-dinner, or some meal which, thank heaven, was not breakfast. Some essayed wit, some beauty, some originality; others—one other at all events—strove only to save himself trouble, and with anchovy toast on the lapel of his coat succeeded in this respect, if no other. (Miss Cholmondeley never knew when she wrote her most famous book how valuable she might be to Man.) Three or four efforts were decidedly good; and these divided the English votes, gaining ten to fifteen apiece. But behold, when the figures were counted, did any English head the poll? By no means. A total of twenty-eight was scored by a Spanish lady for a dull, witless, utterly commonplace drawing of Don Quixote which, offered by anyone else, would have earned no notice at all. Then why did she win? Why she competed, and the five-and-twenty other Spaniards on board voted, that was all. Why not? Are we not always saying that team-work is the essence of success in games? Spain believes it now, as to one game at any rate. And that is why it

is better to be a citizen of that race than of the British. You 'get there.'

It is better, apparently, to be a citizen of the Falkland Islands than of either, judging by the exalted standards which alone seem to decide men's worth in these climes—namely, their power of making money. According to tradition, the population of these islands consists of a 'flea, a governor and a sheep.' But in point of fact both here and on the mainland the sheep-farming industry has been carried to a very high degree of prosperity. Large sums have been made out of it, especially of late years: and, provided nose and grindstone are firmly kept together, large sums may still be made, especially in Patagonia. For my part, I had always thought—and so had you—that the latter was a country of mountain and desert inhabited solely by mountainous savages, any of whom would eat you for breakfast and be hungry for your wife by lunch-time. But here, it seems, we were in error. Much of it is ideal country for sheep; and there are little colonies of sheep-farmers all along the coast, some Welsh, for example, some Scottish and some, alas, German, all waxing fat on mutton and wool. A man who wishes for that kind of life—if such there be—could hardly do better than go to Patagonia in these days; though he will not, of course, get the tit-bits of the country now. If he does go he will do well to insure himself previously against theft: for on three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, and also on three hundred and sixty-five nights, the wind blows with such hurricane force, both on the mainland and on the islands, that he may at any moment find himself whisked away to the South Pole, or wherever the wind may list. Needless to say, the

inhabitants regard this with philosophy, and will tell you that these are the only regions in the world worth inhabiting. But for my part I would have a special form of thanksgiving inserted in the Prayer Book whereby we could daily express our gratitude that we do not live there. There are many less vital things for which we do, or do not, give thanks.

There was no want of thanks on our part, you may be sure, when we left the ship at Monte Video; she to continue her voyage to that temple of the winds, and thence to Chile, Peru, and home through the Panama Canal. Monte Video is very like any other Spanish-American city; beautiful in places with its white houses and deep green foliage, but dirty, noisy, grotesquely over-ornamented and excessively expensive. There is, in fact, nothing much to be said of it, except that it is the principal port and the capital of Uruguay, which is apparently regarded as the most honest—or shall we say least dishonest—of the South American Republics. There have been lurid episodes in her history of course; but on the whole people speak of her with praise or at any rate with patience now; and when you hear what they say of the other Republics—but I dare not quote, present-day paper blisters too easily.

We had an afternoon looking round the town; then sought the river-boat which runs nightly to Buenos Aires. Everyone had assured us that this would be the roughest part of our voyage; that if there were any wind the shallow water of the estuary would rise mountain-high; that the boat would stand alternately upon its head and upon its hinder parts, and make people sick who had never been sick before; and altogether that we were booked for the

worst night we had had since we left England. Fortunately, however, there was no wind; the boat proved very fast and comfortable, and we duly found ourselves at Buenos Aires next morning, twenty-eight days from Liverpool. This was a disgracefully slow passage; for our ship was quite capable of fifteen or sixteen knots, and during the war had even been 'whacked up' to eighteen on occasion. But coal being at the price it then was, and every additional knot meaning an immense increase in consumption—the thirteenth knot, for example, needs far more fuel in proportion than the twelfth—she had preferred to dawdle along most of the way at eleven or twelve knots, a pace more enjoyable for the shareholders than the passengers.

Now you may suppose that it is an easy thing to enter the Argentine Republic, and that we had but to knock at the door to secure ready admission. But if you think that you will be very much mistaken, as we had already discovered. In the first instance, you must go to the Lake Dwellings and get a passport, which the Foreign Office will usually take a week to provide—though, as we proved, by pulling a string, it can be done within an hour. Then you must have this passport *viséd* by the Argentine Consul in London—two minutes' work, for which he keeps it six hours. Then you must find a dependable person who will declare in writing—whether truly or not—that you are sane and have been out of gaol for two years. Then you must get vaccinated—or failing that a certificate that you have been, which is fortunately not quite the same thing. And lastly, you must make sure that no one on your ship has influenza, lest you find yourself stowed

Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires

Pasco de Julio, Buenos Aires

away in quarantine until the crack of doom. All these things have their reason, it is true. Firstly, influenza is apt to be epidemic in the Argentine, and is a far more serious thing there than in England; at any rate creates far more panic. Secondly, your ship will probably have touched at Brazilian ports; and Brazil is usually a hot-bed of small-pox—we were told, for example, that there were thirty thousand cases at Bahia at the moment, all walking about just as usual. Thirdly, the Argentine is not only one of the resorts of those whose character has been impugned in Europe, but since the War it has been the scene of a desperate conspiracy, supposed to be of Bolshevik origin, which very nearly became a widespread insurrection. Altogether one cannot be surprised at their anxiety to say 'Not at home' to certain visitors. Once inside the Republic and proved to be dangerous, I like the way these gentry are dealt with. After the recent rising we were told that two thousand—and some say it was nearer eight thousand—were taken for a voyage for the good of their health and 'died at sea.' I hope it is true, and that the fish did not suffer pain. We could do with that ship nearer home than South America sometimes.

Having successfully entered the Republic, we had three problems. First, to find a hotel one day in which would not mean a week in the Bankruptcy Court. Second, to understand a word of what was said to us. Third, to find a 'dump' for the Half. We had been told that Buenos Aires acts like a vacuum-cleaner upon money, and that the hotels have even greater capacity in this respect than the shops. We found that it was so; and if the actual figures interest you, here they are. Three or four

of those which had been recommended to us—the Phœnix and Savoy, for example—would take us for about 15 pesos a day, and 15 pesos meant at that time little less than £2 a head; for exchange was terribly bad at the moment, and the English pound, which is worth ordinarily about 12 pesos, would then buy only 7·50 to 8. At the La Plaza Hotel, the Ritz of Buenos Aires, we did not inquire; Dives lives there and probably pays £3 to £4 a day for the privilege. The Palace, to which nearly all the English go in these days, is said to be more comfortable than the Plaza and very much cheaper; but unfortunately we were never told of this; and finally we decided upon a small but quite tolerable hotel to which we had been recommended, where English or at any rate American was spoken, and the vacuum-cleaner was not so powerful. Here, for 10 pesos a day per head—about 26s.—we had quite good food and a fair-sized bedroom with two excellent beds and a balcony. The floors were bare, the rooms very high, the noise terrific—trams and motors tearing past us, the latter at top speed with their cut-outs usually open and all hooting or ringing almost continuously. The heat also was very trying, December, January and February being the worst months in Buenos Aires. Altogether the conditions were not what I liked for a Half well below par. However, the other hotels were not less noisy; and none of them had what we had here—namely, a big and quiet garden at the back in which we could take refuge from the din—so here we decided to stay while we looked about us.

Looking about meant first and foremost presenting our introductions. These owing to the hurry of our departure numbered but three all told; and

one of them was at once rendered useless by a mistake on the part of someone 'not ourselves making for righteousness'—namely, a well-meaning gentleman in an office. The man we ought to have seen, as I discovered a few weeks later, was an English railway director who is largely responsible for the erection of one of the finest stations, probably also one of the finest modern buildings, in the world, namely the Retiro terminus. The man we did see —of the same name, but of Argentine birth—was also a director of a big railway; very kind and courteous in every way, and anxious to do all in his power to help us, but not possessing much capacity to do so, since Argentine and English people do not 'mix' much and he could not hand us on to any of our own race. This mistake we never discovered till we had left Buenos Aires. The second introduction was to our Minister there, Sir Claude Mallett, who also did everything in his power to help us, and to whom we owe infinite thanks for the trouble he took to make our way smooth. The third was to an Englishman in business in the city whose office we entered admittedly in fear and trembling; for hitherto, be it remembered, we had made no progress whatever to the solution of that knotty problem, the storage of the Half. But soon in joy and comfort we came forth; for he was 'It,' the one man in the whole country perhaps who could and would give us exactly the help we needed. 'T.C.B.A.' we christened him at once; for to every problem and difficulty we put before him he had one unfailing answer: "That can be arranged." Did we want somewhere for the Half to stay at? "I know just the place, a sugar plantation; that can be arranged." Did we want to change our money?

"Oh yes, I'll see to it; that can be arranged." "Would we like to do our journey by aeroplane?" "To be put up for the English Club?" "To have a sleeping carriage for four reserved for us two?" etc., etc. All that could be arranged without the least difficulty or trouble to ourselves. It mattered not a jot apparently that our hosts of the sugar plantation had never heard of us nor we of them; he had but to telegraph and they would be delighted. In the same way he decided at once that Bolivia was quite out of the question for the Half; she must certainly remain in the Argentine. Time after time he and his fascinating wife entertained us at his house. And it was in fact almost entirely due to his kindness, resource and knowledge of the country that the Half's experience of South America was a decided success instead of, as it might easily have been, a dismal and solitary failure. No words can express our gratitude for what he did for us.

VI

WHAT did we think of Buenos Aires?

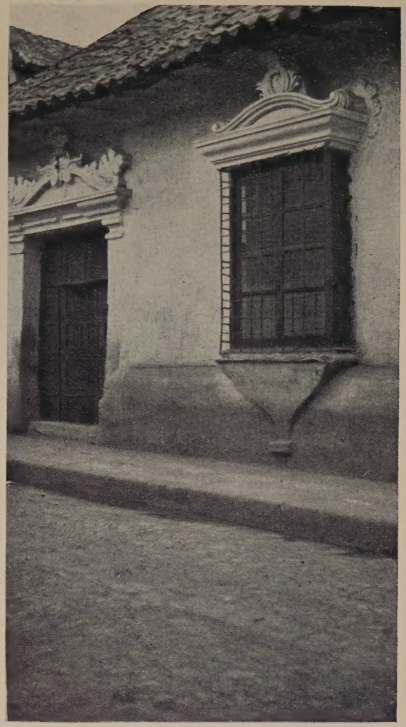
What we thought is of no great importance in view of the fact that we were there only ten days. But for what they are worth I give our impressions, based partly on our own observation and partly on that of English people long resident in the town.

To arrive at this port by sea is to gain at once a glimpse of the national character: for as you steam up the river from Monte Video you see on either side of the carefully marked channel the masts of numerous wrecked ships sticking up out of the water; and on making inquiries you learn that they are victims not only of the frightful waves into which these shallows are lashed by a gale, but also of '*mañana*,' the great national habit, which discourages the doing of anything to-day which can possibly be done to-morrow. Salvage, in fact, is either incompetent, or 'prohibitive,' or is waiting for someone to come from Europe to do it; at any rate it is not done, and there the wrecks remain till the wind and waves dispose of them.

Then, looking at the town, you get a totally different impression, and quite inconsistent with the first — namely, that of the nation's colossal prosperity. Material wealth, utter ugliness—it is almost like another New York. Buildings of colossal height rise like factory chimneys out of the general level; and the effect is like one of those tables of the different mountains of the world which

you see in an atlas and never look at again; except that even there the peaks have some beauty of form and here there is none, only a desire apparently to hit the sky with piles of offices. When you land you find this impression confirmed. Almost all the chief buildings are new, bizarre, meretricious, and to an English eye grotesquely over-ornamented. The Latin cannot stop, that is his failing. Often he gives you—and has given you here—designs of splendid form, dignified, graceful, even magnificent in line; but always in deference to national taste he must deck them out with sensuous, unmeaning ornament; so that the effect is often that of a wedding cake, and that of the town as a whole one of gaudiness rather than beauty. Beauty there is, of course. Here and there the eye is not only relieved but ravished by some exquisite little building that has somehow escaped the attention of the wedding-cake man. Some of the plazas too give a luscious impression of peace and beauty, with their deep green tropical trees. And there are two features of Buenos Aires which I think are without parallel in any town of to-day and which are really worth the long journey to see—namely, the Retiro station, which I have already mentioned, and the iron gates and balcony-fronts with which every house of any pretensions is adorned. Designed and made in Paris by men of to-day, this iron-work seemed to us far more beautiful than anything of the sort we had ever seen in the Old World either in or out of museums. In elegance, lightness and dignity; in loveliness and variety of pattern; in proportion and freedom from the conventional; in everything that metal-work should be they strike the perfect note. House after house is distinguished

House of Congress, Buenos Aires



Old House in Oruro

by some exquisite piece of work; all different, all first-rate, all 'just right.' Nowhere—as so universally with us—do you see a design you already know by heart. Nowhere does the artist, whoever he may be, fail in novelty, strength and right relation of parts to whole. In this matter Buenos Aires—or I suppose I ought to say France—has set up a new standard of what a town can be, a standard which, like that of the Adams and Flaxman in English architecture and decoration, is never likely to be surpassed.

In size the principal part of the town, the kernel of the nut as it were, seems small for so important a place. But this is more than made up for by the range of its suburbs. Take the train in any direction, and it seems as if you will never come to the end of them; rows and rows of white one-storied, flat-roofed cottages stretching away in perfectly straight lines as far as the eye can reach, every one with a little garden behind it, but no attempt at metalling the road in front, which remains what it was when first created—namely, mere earth. These are the homes of the 'labouring' classes; and to look at them is to realise something of the labour problem with which the town is always faced. Apart from the Argentine pure—or impure—most of these people are Italian or Spanish, mere tinder in the hands of their agitators. Of these agitators there is always a plentiful supply arriving from Italy and Spain. And when you reflect upon the numbers of the so-called 'workers' and the fact that they are always being incited in season and out not only to strikes of an utterly unreasonable kind, but also to murder, arson, pillage and general revolution, you see on what a powder-barrel the

community dwells. To do it justice, the Government knows how to deal with these gentry. Violence is always met with still greater violence; and in this respect the rulers of our own country might learn a good deal from their proceedings.

The streets of Buenos Aires are all laid out on the American plan, and are strangely narrow for so big a town. Only two or three, like the Avenida or Entre Rios, have the breadth of Oxford Street; and most of the rest, even the busiest, give little more room than is needed for the walking traffic alone. The object is to keep off the sun; but the result is one of great inconvenience. Down almost every street runs a tram-line, almost always crowded with cars; usually there is only enough space left for one motor or mule-cart to wriggle by; and so progress along a busy street is no light matter. Try the pavement, and you have almost to fight for every inch of the way. Leave it by so much as a foot and you are threatened if not struck by an advancing tram. Take a taxi and the only thing that advances is the cost. If the people who built and who continue to use these streets were ever in a hurry there would have to be a 'first-aid' station at every corner for cases of insanity. But luckily they never are; I doubt if there is any word in their language corresponding to the American 'hustle.' And as for visitors, why, if they do not like the congestion, they must just lump it, and acquire as soon as possible the basic philosophy of the country, 'The morrow is as good as the day.'

This congestion is worse than it otherwise would be for the fact that there is no 'Strand,' 'City,' 'Billingsgate,' 'Bond Street,' or 'Temple' at

Buenos Aires. Business, law, fashion, hotels, theatres, shops and clubs are all huddled together in a few narrow streets; and the followers of all compete for space which is hardly enough for one set alone. Add the tram-line and you have the confusion complete. No street is too narrow for it to invade, nor any route too devious for it to follow. Imagine, for example, a line starting from Victoria and going along Ebury Street and Eaton Terrace to Sloane Square; thence by Cadogan Square, Lennox Gardens and Beauchamp Place to Brompton and Exhibition Roads; and then up Church Street—that would be a parallel case, or nightmare. The fares are relatively cheap for Buenos Aires, twelve centavos (about threepence) for any distance, and the cars are always crowded, for there is no other means of conveyance except taxis and a not very serviceable 'Tube.' The taxis, which are mostly touring cars, are also relatively cheap; one seemed to be able to go almost anywhere within reason for 'un peso.' But to one who has any fear of death it is worth any number of pesos to keep out of them. For the driver's one idea of pace is the maximum to which the car can be urged. Round corners, across main streets, between trams, anywhere where there is room to squeeze or skid, there will he dart without the faintest regard for safety, yours, his own or anybody else's. If ever there were a law on the subject, it has long become obsolete. The *vigilantes* (police) occasionally interfere in extreme cases; but to an Englishman it is the ordinary everyday driving which will seem extreme. Never before have I at any rate been so continuously reminded of Charon's proximity, ticket-book in hand.

Shops in Buenos Aires are things of majesty—and so are their prices. Except in times of abject depression the people are so rich, so anxious to spend their money, and so fond of the best that money can buy, that the tradesman must have the very finest goods that England, Europe and America can produce. Clothes, wines, furniture, boots and shoes, jewellery, motors, fancy goods of every kind, all that the most fantastic luxury can suggest the Argentine will have ; and even that is not good enough for him—or her. Both 'he' and 'she' are always beautifully dressed, probably by far the best-dressed nation in the world. The women's dress, like the men's, appears inordinately expensive ; at any rate it is always of the very latest design ; and often indeed it is ahead of that, for the seasons are of course the reverse of those in Europe, and Paris is apt to send out by way of experiment in December and January what she means to offer her own customers in the following June. I am told, however, by those who have a knowledge of these tremendous matters that the Argentine woman's expenditure is nothing like so great as it would appear. For in contrast to the Englishwoman she needs only one kind of gown. Golf, hockey, hunting, skating, tennis, yachting, walking, the various pursuits for each of which our women must be separately and appropriately clad, hardly exist for her. Even on the *estañcia* (ranch) she seems to do little or no riding, walking, gardening or anything in fact but sitting about. Clad in almost anything up to midday, she only puts on the dress of state when she leaves the house ; and then it usually does for the evening as well as the afternoon, there being no regular and matter-of-course change at dinner-time as there is in England.

Thus she really needs very few clothes; and if you add that she is almost always an expert on the subject, has exquisite taste, does much of the work herself, and indeed, besides being an excellent wife, mother and housekeeper, has little other interest in life but dress, you will realise that she is not quite so expensive as she looks. Englishwomen in the Argentine do not attempt to dress on the same scale; they have not the wealth, and if they had would not care to live in the same way, like animated fashion-plates; they have their usual interests and activities as in England, and dress very much as they would at home, though even this must be no small matter in Buenos Aires, the home of Dives.

The Argentine lady's figure is not to our eyes worthy of her dress, though she always carries it splendidly, and walks with a grace and dignity we certainly cannot beat in England. She is esteemed in fact as in Germany, Spain or the country of the late President Kruger, very largely by her cubic capacity; and consequently she makes no attempt —quite the reverse—to restrain that which in England is the chief terror of her sex. You have to form a new 'orientation' when you go to the Argentine. Fat is fashionable, corpulence compulsory; double your waist-line and you double your proposals. Many of the young girls are as slim and elegant of figure as our own, but no one thinks anything of them till they have 'developed' satisfactorily, and that is not likely to be much before the age of twenty-five or thirty, so high—or rather wide—is the standard demanded by men. The strange thing is that even Englishmen, after living here a little time, seem to acquire the same taste, and demand bulk before anything; so that

one hears of girls of our own race complaining bitterly that they are nothing accounted of, whatever their charms, if some creature of nobler girth is present. From the practical point of view, too, slimness has its drawbacks. The Half, for example, spent an incalculable period—I waiting—in search for a 'ready-made' garment which did not seem fitted for a female elephant rather than a woman; and must have tried on at least a score before she found one that did not leave room within its folds for at least one other person of the same size.

Argentine women—if I may continue for a moment to describe what I have heard of them and their lives—have a very limited sphere as compared with ours. They never seem to enter or indeed are supposed worthy to enter into their husbands' activities or interests. The political work, the estate management, the farm, the games, the 'running' of clubs and societies in which they bear so large a part in England, are not for them in that country. Even the amusements are hardly ever shared. The husband after the first year or so seldom or never goes about with his wife. In Buenos Aires, for example, he will spend evening after evening away from her, gambling; and seldom or never does he dream of taking her with him to a restaurant or theatre. An English friend of ours, staying at one of the Cordoba hill-resorts with her husband and going about with him as usual, was asked by one of the Argentine women in the hotel quite as a matter of course: "Then you are only recently married?" "On the contrary, we have been married ten years." "But——" But only with difficulty could she believe that it was true. This naturally limits their outlook very closely,

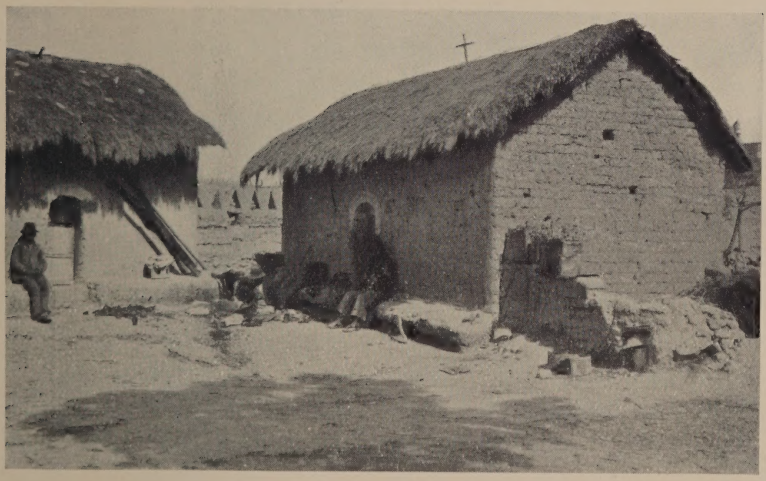
and the majority in fact aim at nothing more than being good cooks, dressmakers, *hausfraus*, wives and mothers; which naturally does not make them interesting. Moreover, their etiquette appears to our eyes preposterously narrow. No married woman, to give an example, would dream of admitting a man into her house even for an afternoon call unless her husband were present. (She knows what would happen if she did.) And the mourning regulations if carried out are so strict that it seems as though they must spend half their lives in black and ceremonious inertia. The departure of even the most remote—and detested—relative is treated like that of a father, sister or wife in England. Out comes the crape for a prescribed period, perhaps as much as two or three years; and for the greater part of that time if not the whole they must live cloistral lives, not even playing the piano in their own houses, lest the atmosphere of unreal grief be lightened by so much as a gleam of happiness. With all their discontents Englishwomen have something to be thankful for!

Argentine manners are a mass of contradictions. The man in the street seems more courteous and less brusque and aggressive than our men in England, but on the other hand he shows very little real consideration for anyone but himself. Time after time, for example, I have seen a woman laden with parcels or a baby climb into a tram-car crowded with men and forced to stand the whole way unless I had a seat to offer her. If I had, I could see that my giving it up caused quite a sensation among the *caballeros* (gentlemen!) there present. And we were warned that no woman of the upper classes should ever go about alone in Buenos Aires. It is

frequently done no doubt, and as a rule no unpleasantness results; but there is always a possibility of this; and it is certain that no unmarried girl should ever go about without an escort; nor any woman, married or unmarried, after dark; if she does she risks being arrested by the *vigilantes* as a suspected person, and may have to spend a night in gaol before she can establish her identity and innocence. That is what they think of unescorted women in Buenos Aires.

What of the men? Well, of course they are chiefly to blame. Twenty years ago apparently a good-looking woman walking anywhere in Buenos Aires would be the subject not only of perpetual staring but of unceasing personal remarks. Almost every man she passed would mutter some gem of gallantry: "Red lips," "O cruel!" "Eyes of love," "Ah, rapture!" and the like. And if she were at all well known for her beauty she would quite likely find in a crowded street a whole rank of men drawn up on the edge of the pavement with hats off and hands on their hearts smiling at her and murmuring flattery. Not that she minded—within limits. On the contrary, we were told that the Argentine or Spanish damsel would be considerably disappointed if she did not receive such well-merited tributes to her beauty, and to this day counts herself by no means a success unless she can glean a full harvest of stares and amorous glances. She has to be content with these now; for at last the fashion of spoken and whispered flattery became so gross that no woman was safe from insult in the streets, and the young men of the better class took the matter in hand and succeeded in making it a punishable offence for a man to be seen speaking to a

House of Congress, Buenos Aires



Typical Bolivian Cottages

woman—even his own sister—in the streets! After that the conditions improved and were never so bad again, though what the ladies thought of them has never been revealed. It is not, one gathers, solely from 'cattishness' that Englishwomen have been known to refer to their Argentine sisters as 'Swivel-eyes.'

It must not be supposed from all this that the Argentine man is always impossible to tolerate in English society. On the contrary, the best of them are as refined, well-read and well-educated as any people in the world, and always intensely generous and hospitable. But the best are few and far between; and the majority, both men and women, are steadily avoided by English people, so that there is little or no social contact between the two races.

One word as to the cost of living here. The whole scale and habit of expenditure not only by the Argentine but also by our own people seem to a newly arrived Englishman so tremendous that he will be apt to find the financial atmosphere very demoralising at first. He may come here with fixed ideas as to what he will spend; but he will be very clever if he manages to adhere to them. Not only is the cost of living tremendously high, but everyone seems to spend his or her money far more lavishly than in our country and with far less thought for the morrow. Added to this the peso is always crying out to him: "I am a shilling. Everyone spends and regards me as a shilling, why not you?" And though he knows that it is really more like two shillings, he will be a very stout fellow if he does not soon forget this and fall into the prevailing habit.

To give an instance of one's expenses, a man

making perhaps four or five thousand pounds a year will only have a tiny house in a suburb such as in England would be inhabited by a prosperous clerk and be rented at seventy to a hundred pounds a year; and he will be exceedingly careful too how he lives in it, so immense are the wages demanded by servants and so vast the general expenses of a household. No, the Argentine is not a country for the poor. Nor without big capital can you expect now to become one of the rich. The day of small starts and big results has gone by. Those who think to find a fortune here should ask Mr Punch's advice—and take it.

VII

To travel by rail in the Argentine summer is to become a dust-bin. You breathe dust and eat it, drink it, smoke it, see it and almost hear it buzzing round you, sleep in it and when you wake in the morning find yourself buried in it. Escape is not. Resignation and a dust-coat avail but little. You can but meet grit with grit, and pray for the end.

The end is far, and the monotony extreme on most journeys. For from sea-coast to Andes the country is flat as a slate; not a hill to be seen, barely a ripple in the ground. North, south, west you may travel for four and twenty hours from Buenos Aires and see only the same endless plain. There are leagues and leagues of rough grass and alfalfa: there are fields of corn; some swamp, occasionally a sheet of water; numbers of cattle and horses; wire fences; very few trees; the sky-line only broken by ricks, and by the hideous metal windmills which automatically supply the drinking troughs with water. Some people say that you can get water anywhere in the Argentine by boring a few feet; but the experience of those who have tried does not seem to bear this out. Often you have to go very deep to get any. When you do you may find it brackish and useless. Or you may even have all your trouble for nothing and find none at all. The artesian well for some reason does not seem to find much favour here; I think owing to the geological formation. And so here and there it has been found impossible to raise cattle. Taking

the country as a whole, however, neither this nor any other drawback seem to matter in the face of the extraordinary fertility of the soil. By all the laws of farming much of it ought long ago to have shown signs of exhaustion, so hardly has it been worked. But exhaustion is the last thing the Argentine farmer ever thinks about. Year after year he puts the same crops into the same land, and can be sure of getting the same yield. Wheat is laid down for unthinkable periods in succession—I know of a case of twenty-eight years and believe thirty-five and forty to be nothing unusual—and the last crop under equal conditions is quite as good as the first. To see a country like this is to realise how hopeless it is for England to grow her own corn. Meat and milk, the very best cattle and horses, and a big Navy to guard our food supplies—that is plainly our policy, and always will be.

The Argentine seems to flourish rather in spite of than because of its land system or tradition, such as it is. In many cases, for example, a man buys an *estañcia* simply with the idea of selling again at a profit when he has spent a few years improving it. There is, too, a law of succession which decrees that when a man dies his land shall go, whether he like it or not, to his sons in equal shares; so that the general tendency is towards perpetual change of ownership, breaking up of big estates, and lack of continuity. In practice, however, this is usually got over by the formation of syndicates. Every year sees more and more of the country cultivated by groups of men rather than by individual farmers: and so in spite of the law the big estate does continue: and a very good thing too, since this is emphatically a country for the big farmer and not

for the small. It is worth while observing by the way that it is by selling their land at enormous prices rather than by actually cultivating it that the Argentines have made most of their wealth. Take, for example, the half-acre of ground on which a friend of ours built his house at Hurlingham, the principal English suburb of Buenos Aires. It cost him £1000.

In speed, comfort and general management, the railways seem fairly near the European standard. On a long journey the trains consist almost entirely of sleeping and restaurant carriages. You are allotted your berth, in a compartment with one or possibly three companions. By day the berths are turned into seats; and in this compartment you can enjoy a privacy as complete as in a cabin at sea; a great boon even for men, who, especially if they have been in the East, will not relish travelling cheek by jowl with some of the Argentine native population; but an absolute essential for ladies, for it is not considered advisable for them ever to travel alone, and if they do they will be wise to remain in their cabins throughout the journey, not even going to the restaurant-car for their meals, lest they be given cause to regret it.

The engines in these days are fired with *quebracho*, an intensely hard, heavy wood which grows in great profusion in the northern part of the Republic; sinks in water; gives out almost as much heat as coal; and now that the latter and its freightage have become prohibitive forms the principal fuel of the country, both for the railways and often for private purposes too. You see it heaped on every available inch of locomotive and tender, on trucks at every station, and in huge reserves at the principal places.

Until all the engines are equipped with oil furnaces *quebracho* will reign. Then comes oil; and if there be any sense in the country, it will be native oil; for there is plenty of it in the southern part of the Republic, and given private management it could undoubtedly be made to pay. But as it is most of the wells are under Government control: and when you have said that of anything in the Argentine you have said the last word on the subject; the Lime-house of the world could produce no more blistering anathema.

There are numerous small stations to be seen as you cross the eternal plain; all alike; a few flat-roofed houses, one of which if not more is sure to sell drinks—anyone can do this in South America by merely paying for a licence. You see a few trees, a few horses tied up to a railing, a few people lounging about; and always a few tracks, dignified by the name of roads, leading away straight as a die to the horizon, where presumably they find some object for their existence, for there is never any in sight. Roads, in our sense of the word, there are practically none outside the towns; for there is no stone nearer the sea than the Cordoba hills, and the cost of using it for roads would be much too great. When Buenos Aires wants stone for this purpose or for building, it often sends to Norway or Sweden—though of late this supply too has been rendered almost prohibitive by the rise in freights. These tracks, of course, become swamps in wet weather and dust-storms in dry. They will carry a motor under the latter conditions; but under the former you risk complete sepulture, and it is always necessary to carry a rope for 'hauling out.' Wiser is he who drives a dog-cart or the farm-cart of the

country, a huge two-wheeled affair with enormous wheels, drawn as a rule by six or eight mules of various sizes—it always looks as if the owner had decided to take out his whole stable for a treat, or else to show the world about him how rich he is in mules.

Across this dreary plain for a night and a day we travelled, in grilling heat and a great blanket of dust. Then we saw in the blue distance the hills of Cordoba; we saw houses and gardens and a made road and other signs of civilisation; and in due time we arrived at Cordoba itself, one of the biggest towns in the Argentine. These hills are a great resort for Buenos Aires people in summer heat, and possess plenty of hotels and boarding-houses; otherwise they are nothing remarkable. On we went, another night, the dust still with us, and awoke to—what do you suppose? The roar of an aeroplane close to the railway. There the thing was, pirouetting round a field before the admiring populace—a wanton and astounding thing to happen in the central wilds of the Argentine Republic. It belonged probably to an International Aviation Commission (sent, I believe, by France, England and Italy) which was then camping near Buenos Aires and endeavouring to persuade the inhabitants to go about their business by aeroplane. The Argentine is no doubt a good country for the purpose; huge distances and uniform flatness; a good country too for buying our disused machines, so rich; but one doubts the commercial success. How many people, even Argentines, can afford to keep a staff of trained mechanics at their *estañcias*? How many will relish a break-down hundreds of miles from anywhere?

And how are huge petrol supplies to be maintained at great distances from a railway?

We travelled a few hours longer, now through great fields of sugar-cane, with factories at frequent intervals, then at last arrived at our destination, Concepcion, a small town south of Tucuman, near to which was La Corona, the sugar plantation where the Half was to be dumped. We were met by one of the managers with a car and a luggage-cart and a wagon-load of kindness; were driven through the chaotic streets of the town at break-neck speed; and after a mile or so came to the factory, a vast, irregular building with a huge chimney and crane outside it, the latter for handling the cane. Like all factories it was very plain in itself; but unlike ours in England it was redeemed from hideousness by its environment; huge eucalyptus-trees, an avenue of weeping willows, a lot of dense tropical foliage; and behind it—a marvel of grandeur and beauty—the Aconquija, a vast wall of mountains twelve to fifteen thousand feet high, bright pink and purple in the morning sun, gleaming here and there with snow, and looking at first like a scene-painter's work, so stagy and unreal was their colour, but convincing you slowly that they were all the more beautiful for that, since for once an artist's dream of impossible loveliness had come true and the real and the ideal marched together hand in hand. That was the back-ground, perhaps ten miles away. The fore-ground was a vast expanse of dust, a corral or field packed with mules, waiting to be used and not even eating, for there was nothing to eat; and opposite the factory, bowered in trees and flowers, three or four white-walled one-storied houses with thatched roofs coming low down over wide

verandahs. "Baths," we whispered to each other, "baths!" And the spirits that were in us, choked and laid low by dust, arose and shouted. Baths were soon at our service; and I will wager that in the whole history of the world's ablutions they were never more urgently needed.

Now La Corona was the home of the Half for nearly two months; but it was mine for only four days; so I can but give scattered notes upon it, mainly provided by her. To me the memorable things are the intense heat and the intense kindness of our hosts; and the latter, look you, is the more memorable for the former. For anywhere in the sugar country at this time of year the heat is often so grilling, fever and dysentery so common, and insect pests so exasperating that the strongest will feel little more than half alive, and the slightest extra strain on the nerves is apt to be strongly resented by those long-suffering organs. The more grateful then are we for the infinite trouble they took to make our stay enjoyable. Strictly speaking, the company owning the factory was our host; but in its unavoidable absence its duties were undertaken by the half-dozen Englishmen and their wives who actually or metaphorically cause the wheels to go round; and it is largely due to their unfailing kindness that the Half enjoyed her stay in South America so much.

At the time we arrived there was little work going on; for between November and April is the 'slack' season (so called) when the sugar-cane is growing. During 'crop,' however, when it is being cut and brought in—a period beginning as a rule in April or May and lasting from two to five months—these men have terrifically hard work; for the delivery

and crushing of the cane proceed continuously night and day, and even the smallest stoppage throws everything out of gear. There must, for example, always be one or other of the engineers in the factory to repair any mechanical defect; and the work of the office staff is apparently little less exacting. One does not quite see when they sleep. Possibly they put off doing so till December, when the crop is all disposed of. But even then the engineers have their hands pretty full; for the crushing and refining machinery is complex, elaborate and on a tremendous scale; and the need of renewals and repairs keeps them busy during a great part of the 'slack' season as well as the other.

Up till a short sime ago the financial crop must have been very heavy in fat years, and quite desirable in lean. But the immense rise in wages which has taken place recently here as elsewhere, and the immense increase in the cost of machinery must make it difficult now to produce a good balance-sheet; and till these items become normal again this difficulty will continue. Lean years are, roughly speaking, years of frost. Five degrees (F.) below freezing-point will do much damage to the cane; and anything much more than that coming early in the season spells utter disaster. Fortunately it does not often come; but this district is quite as far south as it ought to be for sugar; too near, that is, to the South Pole for strict safety; and until the critical time has passed there is always a good deal of anxiety.

As for disposing of the sugar when refined, this until three or four years ago was simple enough; for supply in the Republic was not equal to demand.

A House and Garden at La Corona

Scene near Mendoza

Recently, however, the reverse condition has obtained; and when we were there there was plenteous trouble on this point, mainly owing to Government intervention. With one eye the Premier (who has the full use of both) beheld a surplus of sugar clamorously demanded by Europe. With the other he beheld the votes of the Argentine people already querulous of high prices, and wept for them. At all cost they must be comforted—do not Premiers live by votes? So he decreed that sugar might be exported, but only on condition that it was sold to the Argentine people at a figure which the growers alleged to be below the cost of production. Hence arose a devastating controversy: and while people in England were unable at times to get their full ration of sugar, people in the Argentine were wondering if it would not be better to burn their surplus or bury it in the ground. I do not say that they actually did either; but this is quite a fair example of the delights of doing business in South America, and of the attitude to the world of Argentine politicians.

These gentlemen are, of course, among the most honeyed and accomplished diplomatists of the human race. A book might be filled with the stories about them. Let me quote just one—that of The Tucuman Plague. Eighty of the nominal supporters of the 'In' party were suspected just before an election of infirmity of purpose. Infirmity of another kind was therefore alleged against them—namely, bubonic plague; and they were duly interned in a compound at a safe distance from the town, and inoculated with a preventative virus. Whatever the medical properties of this

virus, it certainly prevented their voting; for it produced in them symptoms so like those of the plague that they could not possibly be allowed to go about infecting other people; nor if they had would they have had the strength to get to the poll. So there they remained till the voting was over; and the 'Ins' sailed in once more.

There is much riding at La Corona: no one indeed in South America ever dreams of walking if a horse or mule is procurable. A deal of polo is played, except in the hot season. There is always tennis, fishing in the rivers, and guanaco shooting in the hills, the guanaco being a near relation of the llama. Ponies and mules abound. And there is also a Ford car of venerable antiquity which amidst unheard-of conditions has never been known to fail: the conditions being that the 'roads' suggest a rough sea which has been suddenly frozen in mid-air, and that its normal load was considered to be eight: ten was regarded as a slight strain on the springs, but 'nothing to write home about till you got to twelve.' So here as in any other part of the world the English race manage to enjoy themselves very thoroughly when off duty. A sugar-growing district is not a health resort; there is no doubt about that. Sugar needs an orchid-house atmosphere. The human frame does not. And so there is a good deal of fever and dysentery here, and at times frightful mortality among the natives, especially the children. But not a whit is the Englishman dismayed. He does his work and plays his games as though there were no climate to be considered. Those at La Corona at any rate regarded it as one of the best places in the world to live in and infinitely

preferable to anything they could have had in England. To each one his taste. To the visitor fresh from that sunless country the conditions at this time of year certainly suggested those awaiting the majority of us elsewhere.

VIII

I TOOK train from La Corona on a grilling day of December, with the Half and others who designed to do Christmas shopping in the town of Tucuman. We passed through leagues and leagues of sugar-cane, with factories at frequent intervals; and at midday reached the town, which is the capital of the province of Tucuman, one of the richest tracts of country in the world. That the houses were not built of sugar and the streets paved with it seemed to us surprising, but was true. Like many other rich cities it is entirely plain and commonplace; streets laid out on the American plan, houses all white, a plaza, a church that must surely be the ugliest in all the world, trams everywhere—except where you want to go—and noise indescribable. It also possesses, as I was to find to my cost, four stations.

From one of these which we will call 'Euston' to sharpen my story, I was to go on that evening; expecting to reach La Quiaca, on the northern boundary of the Argentine Republic, within thirty-six hours, and thence travel by motor *diligenzia* to the nearest station of the Bolivian railway, which was nominally a matter of only two more days. Thus if all went well I should reach Oruro in time to keep my appointment with the brothers Martin on Christmas Day. And in my fatuous ignorance of South America I actually assumed that all would go well, and that having planned a time-table I should have no difficulty in keeping to it.

Thus demented then I drove to Euston, and asked as a matter of course for a berth in that night's train.

"There will be no train to-night," was the answer in Spanish. "*Huelga* [strike]."

"But——" I simply gasped.

"*Huelga.* Would you like to see the manager?"

"I would."

"You cannot, he is at breakfast."

"But——"

"Come back in an hour's time."

"But——"

My 'but' was answered by a slam-to of the shutter, and I was left gaping outside, struck dumb by the disaster that had suddenly descended upon me.

Disaster it was indeed. For *huelga* means very much more in the Argentine than it does in England. Here a railway strike is a thing that can hardly hope to succeed, and at worst is not likely to last more than a week. There the duration may be six or seven weeks or even more; and the accompaniment a general orgy of violence and rebellion. As things stood even a week would be serious for me, for I should be by that much late at Oruro and should put out all the Martins' plans, for they would have no idea when I was likely to appear. If it were much more than a week, I might even have to give up all idea of going by this route at all, and might have to return to Buenos Aires, cross by the Transandine Railway to Valparaiso, steam up the coast to Antofogasta, and thence go by rail to Oruro; a matter of at least a fortnight, and much more likely a month, for at this time of year the Transandine Railway is apt to be *interrumpido* by snow, land-

slip or flood, and I should probably have to wait a week or two in Buenos Aires till it was open for traffic. Was it my fate, I wondered, after travelling for six weeks and all these thousands of miles, to be held up when within thirty-six hours of the Bolivian frontier for a period that would make it almost useless for me to have come at all? It was by no means impossible. And the little that I could find out, with my fragmentary Spanish, was not encouraging. The strike had apparently been threatened for a long time, and was probably quite justified; for while the English-managed railways in the Argentine treat their employees very reasonably and well, the Government railways impose very harsh conditions, exacting everything and giving nothing; and even at a moment like this, if one knew the rights of the case, one's sympathies would probably be with the men.

I left my heavy luggage at 'Euston,' took my two bags to the restaurant where our party was to have lunch, and there on their advice decided to go back to La Corona, at any rate for a few days, to see what happened. After lunch I returned to 'Euston,' leaving my bags at the restaurant, and was able to see the English manager of the railway, which by the way was not the railway on which the strike had begun, though in ordinary times the train to the north did start from his station. He knew no more than anyone else if the strike would go on or not, though in view of the men's grievances it was extremely probable that it would. But he thought it just possible that a train would run on the following morning. Would I telephone him then? I clutched at the straw, decided to stay the night in Tucuman, and went back to the restaurant for my

bags. Alas, alas, they were gone. My party had not only left to catch their train back to La Corona—I was to have gone back by a later one—but in their zeal they had also taken my light luggage, containing everything I most needed for the journey—clothes, passport, papers, maps, money, things without which it was impossible to move. If a train did run on the morrow, possibly the last for many weeks, I could not go in it!

Frantically I took a *coche*; there might be just time to catch the party at their station, which we will call 'Vauxhall.' Knowing the possibility of error, I pronounced its name—I think it was Centrale—and also the name of the railway, Cordoba Central, three times over to the *cochero*, as man never pronounced a name before. Three times over he repeated it, nodding and grinning from ear to ear. We started. We galloped, scattering the populace right and left. We lurched in and out of tram-lines. We skidded, and skirted the brink of death—we and others. If, thought I watch in hand, the train were as late as most things are in South America we might just catch it. And in my flurry and ignorance of the town's geography I never noticed where we were going, trusting blindly to the *cochero's* knowledge. He drove then and drove; and lo, when we were still within a minute of train-time, and I had made up my mind that all was well and I should yet recover my bags, he pulled up with a flourish and a grin of satisfaction—at the wrong station! This was, say, 'Paddington.' 'Vauxhall' was a thousand miles away. He had done me after all.

Alas, I could not tell him what I thought of him; for that would have needed a deal more Spanish

than I possessed, or am ever likely to. I could but invoke the wrath of heaven upon his head, and set about telegraphing to La Corona. There was, I knew, a train running from Concepcion to Tucuman very early in the morning; and it was just possible that my bags might be sent by this in time for me to catch the train which might or might not run to the north. I returned to 'Euston' therefore; to get more advice before telegraphing; and soon had reason to thank my stars that I had done so. For when I had drafted the telegram in English and shown it to the manager—whom may the gods reward—he told me that in that language and by the line I had chosen it would cost two pesos (five shillings), and possibly take two days *en route.* "They don't take much notice of a telegram out here, you know," he added, as though it were quite a matter of course: "and none at all of a letter." If, however, I put it in Spanish it would cost about tenpence; and if I sent it by the railway telegraph line, which is apparently allowed to compete with the 'Nacional,' it might possibly reach La Corona before the end of the present day. Still more important, if it were sent in his name it would almost certainly arrive within an hour, for then it would be taken notice of. Such are the ways of South America!

He very kindly translated the message and sent it in his own name; then told me that there seemed to be quite a chance of my getting on next day if only the train from La Corona brought my bags in time. With all my heart I thanked him, and the gods for having created him, and sought my 'hotel' in the town.

On the way thither the heavens opened like a tank

of which the bottom has fallen out, and their contents came down in solid pillars of rain which continued for well over an hour. With this came thunder and lightning such as I had never heard or seen before; and I began to think that there was some truth in a rumour which had been prevalent in the district for some time past—and I have since heard in other countries also—namely, that the world was going to bring its existence to a close on this particular date. It did not oblige the prophets by doing this so far as the general public was concerned; but it certainly came to an end for three or four people that day, killed by lightning; and so the prophets might claim that they 'also ran.' Damage, too, was done to property which will not readily be forgotten.

My 'hotel' will not be readily forgotten either. In South America the hotel-keeper seems to think of the human being as an animal that feeds and sleeps but does nothing in the interval. There is always a big dining-room, very public, with a bar at one end; probably a couple of billiard-tables, a piano and a gramophone. There is a courtyard round which the bedrooms are grouped. There are generally one or two bath-rooms, which though dirty are cleaner than the rest of the establishment for the reason that they are less frequented. The bedrooms have stone or earth floors, bare distempered walls, no furniture except a bed (usually good), a washing-stand and a chair. There are no windows; only doors, of which the upper half is glass, opening directly on to the courtyard. So if you want air you have to open your door to get it; and if you want it at night you risk the visitation of any beasts, four-footed or otherwise, who

may have a fancy to call on you—and your possessions. There is practically never a sitting-room of any kind; nowhere in fact to go to when you are not eating or sleeping: and I suppose the idea is that if you are doing neither of these things you will be drinking; at any rate that is what the landlord wants you to do, and that is the beginning and end of his concern for you.

I managed to get a bedroom and a filthy meal. I even got a good and non-verminous night, which was surprising under the circumstances; and when morning came I was at 'Euston' long before seven, the appointed hour, and had to wait half-an-hour for the manager to appear. At last he came. He telephoned. And he learned that a train would probably run, though not from his station. It would go from another, say 'Brixton,' and none could tell at what hour it would go nor how far it would get. "Had I better go by it?" I asked. "Surely; there may not be another for several weeks." So I decided to go if the gods permitted. But would they? Would my bags arrive from La Corona in time? The position was nerve-racking; and far worse for the fact that I had practically no Spanish, and so might easily miss any chance there was of catching the train through sheer inability to make myself understood. In a moment of benevolence for which no thanks of mine can ever repay him that manager asked one of his assistants to go with me and see me through; and off we started.

First we drove, miles and miles, with my heavy luggage to 'Brixton,' and put it in what passed for a cloak-room. The station and approaches were packed with soldiers to keep order; and we learned that the train would probably start

at nine; but it might be earlier—or later—it depended on whether trouble arose or not. Then we drove more miles, two at least I suppose, to 'Vauxhall' to see if my bags had come. They had not. The train, due at eight, was already twenty minutes behind time; and we learned on making inquiries that it would be at least an hour late. That seemed the final blow; for if my train to the north really started at nine there was plainly no hope for me. Again, however, to lighten my despair, my invaluable Ally pointed out that there was still a chance of success. If he or better still his chief asked them to keep the train waiting for me at 'Brixton' he had little doubt that they would. (Imagine that in England!) So back we pelted to interview 'them'; and there the Ally interceded for me and secured a promise that unless there was trouble they would wait a little time for me, how long they would not say. Back then we went once more to 'Vauxhall,' where we watched the clock-hand creep slowly on to nine, and after nine; and still there was no sign of a train. At length at twenty minutes past nine it dawdled in as though no one in the world cared whether it arrived that day or next; and there in the van I saw my precious bags and rejoiced. But do you suppose that I could be allowed to touch them either that moment or that day, or indeed on any day in the calendar without a *guia* (consignment note), which, according to the regulations, *must* come by post and could not come with the things themselves? Not I, alone. South America does not approve of such directness. And but for the Ally I should certainly have had to wait at least till next day and probably longer. Mercifully, however, as a railwayman he

could exercise the mysterious power of his craft, and summon other railwaymen to deliver regardless of all regulations. They did deliver without the faintest hesitation, or justification; and back once more we drove to 'Brixton,' hoping against hope that the train might still be there, though already half-an-hour behind its stated time. It was there, fuming to be off. Into it I was thrown without ticket or registration ticket, but with my precious bags, and off we went. For a whole forty minutes, I was told, it had been kept waiting expressly for me; and that at a time when every moment might bring trouble. Such is the power of English railwaymen in the Argentine; and never shall I forget what I owe them, for I afterwards learned that this was the last train that ran on that line for several weeks.

IX

The train was crammed; no sleeping carriages, no *comedor* (restaurant), no seats; barely a corner in which to perch on my suit-case. Why? Partly no doubt because many people believed—rightly—that this might be the last train for a very long time; but also because, as I discovered later, the native Argentine thinks nothing of taking one seat for himself and four more for his luggage, leaving you to think that the latter are taken and will sooner or later be occupied. Room for himself and his traps and room in which to spit, that is all he asks; and the rest of us may go—to another place. How he found room to spit in this train I do not know, for even the corridor was packed as well as the seats. But he did. Oh yes, he managed it; and so far as I could tell there was no moment of the journey when this need of his nature went unsatisfied.

There were arméd men, two of them with loaded rifles at either end of each carriage; two also on the engine; and perhaps half-a-dozen at every station, showing what the Government expected of the strikers. Bombs, de-railing of trains, threatening the engine-hands with knife or revolver—these are some of the things they expect. I gathered that it was a question at every station whether we should ever get to the next; and recalled—without relish this time—the tale of the trainful of Argentine magnates which was held up once for a whole fortnight at a tiny wayside station, hundreds of miles from anywhere, with only a day's supply of food—

and drink. At most stations in the Argentine you have only to go out on to the nearest *estañcia* and exercise a little strategy to secure as much beef—belonging to someone else—as you want. But it is not by beef alone that magnates live—or indeed anyone else in the Argentine—and without drinks! The situation is unthinkable.

As for us it did not look as if we should even get enough beef judging by the country through which we were passing; for it was all small trees and scrub. Nor, when I at length discovered the only Englishman who was on the train—namely, one 'M. R.,' chief engineer of a big group of mines in Bolivia, to which he was returning from a holiday in England—did I gather any comfort from him. He said that the train would certainly not run at night for fear of displaced rails; and he was very doubtful if it would be allowed to run even by day to any point that would be of the smallest use to us. What insanity had possessed him to come by this route when he might as easily have gone by Antofogasta he could not imagine; he who had been in South America for twenty years and knew every trick that Beelzebub can play upon the unwary: and roundly he reviled himself for his folly and appealed to the high gods to know why it had happened. I could tell him easily enough, and still more easily a few days later when difficulties multiplied — namely that a guide, philosopher, friend, interpreter, Bradshaw and general courier had been needed to help me on my way, and it was he to whom had been paid the honour of selection. I did not tell him this at the moment, but I hope he will appreciate it now and be consoled. At any rate I appreciate very deeply the kindness, patience

and invaluable help he bestowed upon me. Without him I should still be drifting about on the borders of the Argentine and Bolivia, betwixt the upper and the nether worlds, like Tomlinson of Berkeley Square, and should never have got to the latter country at all. Which of the two is heaven I must leave you to judge.

The line rose sharply through wooded country of extraordinary beauty straight up a range of hills; and presently I realised that we were running on rack and pinion, so steep was the gradient. This method came into use more than once during the journey to La Quiaca; and might have done so more frequently with advantage to our progress, the engine proving quite unequal to Sir Martin Conway —that spider—in the task of scaling the Andes. We passed through leagues of wooded, hilly country covered with low scrub, but yielding very little herbage; which accounts no doubt for the rarity and poverty of the farms we passed from time to time, and the poor appearance of the cattle, a great contrast to those we had seen on the plains. The earth has been tossed here into an incredible variety of shapes and knolls: and what with the delight of watching their changing lines and the semi-tropical foliage that covered them, the rivers that were almost always with or near us, the big mountains in the background, and the constant sunshine—its heat, however, now tempered by our altitude—the journey had its charms; the only question being, how long would it last?

It did last as a matter of fact without trouble of any kind right through this day; and even, despite the prophets, far into the night. Somewhere about one A.M. we saw ahead of us the lights of a town.

M. R. declared them to be those of Jujuy—pronounced, if you can, Hoo Hwee—where we were to stop for the night: and as though to confirm his words we did stop promptly; not at the station indeed, but on a hill a mile or so outside it, where we remained for nearly half-an-hour while the engine got up steam for the climb. That was a pleasant half-hour at the end of a sixteen hours' journey. But it was almost as pleasant as the remainder of the night. We were driven to a 'hotel,' and I give in parallel columns two impressions of it, so as to be fair to all parties.

1. *From its note-paper*: "Establecimiento moderno. Departamentos para Familias. Cuartos de Baño con Agua Fria y Caliente. Casa especial para viajeros. Buen confort. Rigurosa Higiene. Precios Economicos."
T—— DE M—— E HIJOS (sons)

2. *From a letter of mine written on that paper*: "First let me consign to the place where, among other inconveniences, 'the fire is not quenched' T—— de M—— e Hijos, e padre, e abuelo (grandfather), e padrino e madrina (godfather and godmother), e esposa, e hijas, e parientes (relatives) e amigos to the fourth and fifth generation: for a filthier spot than his 'hotel' I have not struck even in South America, nor more nauseating food. The only *buen confort* that I have found is that I have not

been eaten alive, as M. R. has even during the five or six hours that we spent in bed. Another night, and there will be nothing of him left; for he is a very thin man."

There was only one bedroom for the two of us, and that with three beds; so that if we had not been well treated by Fate we might have had the company of another *viajero* (traveller), and he perhaps of native race—and habits. However, we were at least spared this calamity, and only had to put up with the other 'company' of whom I have spoken. The hotel was, as usual in South America, a one-storied building consisting of a few windowless bedrooms ranged round a courtyard, and a big billiard-room-restaurant with a bar. In the latter, during the evening we spent there, and no doubt every evening, the greater part of the population seemed to gather together; partly to eat the unspeakable food; partly to drink; partly to play billiards; partly to stare at us or any other hapless *viajeros* who might be detained here; partly to listen to an insufferable trio of piano, mandolin and fiddle which probably played the same music there every night; and partly to smoke unhallowed cigars and cigarettes. ('Pour la Noblesse' is the tone in cigarettes in all remote places of the Argentine; in fact you can hardly get any other; and one is always wondering if the maker has ever found one of those for whom he makes.) There really was a bath-room; but dirty as we were we shrank in terror from that, and returned to our

basins. One of the few advantages of a South-American hotel is that either there is no carpet at all in your bedroom, or else it is so far gone that nothing can make it worse; and so you can sluice yourself to your heart's content from the basin without thinking of any possible damage.

Jujuy is a small but very prosperous town tucked in under big hills to the north and west; and on the other sides surrounded by small hills, thickly wooded, of an infinite and most lovely variety of shapes. It is the centre of a very rich district producing a number of different crops. It has a good bit of history behind it—'wars and rumours of wars.' It has an asphalted street, a thing almost unique in provincial South America; a military depot; and a bridge of enormous length over its river. This bridge is a noteworthy possession for this part of the world; for if you want to cross a river among the Andes you expect as a rule to have to wade it or else ride on a mule; at once if the river is low; in two or three hours or days or weeks or months if it is high. And here perhaps I had better explain what is meant by a 'river' among these mountains—I had ample opportunity of finding out! In the course of ages the water has hollowed out from the soft and crumbling hills a valley of great width, almost flat from side to side. Down this tumbled expanse of mud and rocks and gravel and sand, perhaps thirty yards broad, perhaps as much as a mile, the stream flows where it pleases; sometimes a mere trickle, sometimes 'not even that,' sometimes a gigantic torrent. Day by day it carves new ways for itself, now in one part of the valley, now in another. In dry times it is bone-dry; in wet it may rise in less than half-an-hour to a

torrent of tremendous volume, coming at you like a great wall of water, rolling boulders over and over in its bed, sweeping everything before it, and making short work of any men or animals it may find in its path. Many are the cases of drowning recorded here and in Bolivia every year. Wherever the ground on either side of the valley is even a few inches above the average water-level you will see fields, so-called, at any rate some attempt at cultivation; and when these are as much as a few feet above it they are quite a success, bearing splendid crops of barley, maize or oats. But at any lower level their existence is very precarious. The owner is always trying with rough barriers of stone to keep the river in its place; but with so fickle an adversary he cannot always succeed; and at any moment it may transport a great part of his soil with the crop that is growing on it down to his next-door neighbour, leaving him like a bankrupt testator, with 'gross real property so many acres, net real property *nil*.' That he should continue to 'farm' under such conditions is a wonderful testimony to the tenacity of the human race.

There was one other feature of Jujuy which is perhaps worthy of mention, and that because it is so typical of South America. Being the centre of a province, it must obviously have a big Government building: and there in a corner of the town entirely deserted by mankind you may see such a thing, or rather about one-fifth of it: the beginnings, that is, of a huge structure built mainly of stone, without roof, doors or windows; quite unfrequented by human beings, either workmen or others; and looking for all the world as if someone had 'begun to build and was not able to finish.' And that is

literally what it is. In this country directly someone desires to commemorate his term of office—the veil of silence were usually more fitting, and in England would be deemed an orgy of charity—he arranges if possible to do so by erecting a Government building, whether needed or not. Perhaps his generation has money enough to build the foundations and one storey; or else an imposing frontage and nothing behind it. Then probably for ten or twenty years the building remains untouched, and the weather deals with it as it pleases. Another generation may provide a second storey or a courtyard or a flight of stairs; the next after that the third storey and some of the wood-work; and finally, in about three parts of a century the roof is clapped on and the building completed: by which date if there is any mercy in the breast of Time the founder's name (and peculations) will probably have been forgotten, and another hero of equal achievements will get the credit.

We had to spend a whole day at Jujuy, uncertain all the time whether the train would go on on the morrow or not. Fortunately it did, the strike not having broken as yet into full flame; and at six o'clock on the second morning off we went again, still with our armed escort, and for hours climbed, largely on rack and pinion, up into the mountains; the vegetation growing more and more scanty the higher we went, and the animals and the attempts at cultivation more and more wretched. Late in the evening we reached what seemed to be the top of the world, a huge plateau eleven thousand feet above sea-level; which with intervals extends, so I was told, right away to La Paz in the northern part of Bolivia, separating the eastern and western ranges

of the Andes from each other. Noticing the altitude at a station I was delighted to find myself unaffected thereby except for a slight sense of splitting in the ears; and there could hardly be a severer test than this, for if we had not come here at express speed—twelve miles an hour was probably our average—we had at least come as fast as human means could bring us. So *siroche* I thought was not for me.

In pitch darkness we arrived at length at La Quiaca, the frontier station and terminus of the Argentine railway; where I discovered that Fate was already awaiting me with a big stick, fully alive to what I had come for. The motor *diligenzia* on which I had been relying to carry me through to the Bolivian railway system was broken down or stuck in a swamp dozens of miles away, and might not be running again for several days or even weeks. To my amazement and disgust there was nothing whatever to take its place. Though the route was in constant use by travellers to and from Bolivia there was neither horse, mule, nor any form of transport in the village. I had been told certainly that at this time of year the 'road' was apt to be bad and the *diligenzia* might be delayed; but I had never dreamed that there would be no substitute of any kind. Once more it looked as though my arrival at Oruro might be indefinitely delayed, and that I might only reach it in time to find that the Martins had given me up and gone on their journeys alone. I certainly could not have blamed them if they had.

M. R. spoke wingéd words; for he also was in trouble. He had to go nearly as far as I by road, and there was no sign either of his men, his carriage or his mules. But though he spoke like a machine-

gun, ten thousand words to the minute—and he tells me that he speaks Spanish now better than English and in England is accused of having a foreign accent—no words could bring him mules; and we went to our bedroom in the 'hotel' very sore and hopeless as to the morrow. I was beginning to realise what 'travel' means in South America.

X

He who wakes in La Quiaca can have but one aspiration in his mind. He sees around him a few one-storied buildings made of mud: he sees the railway station, the *aduana* (custom-house), one or two more rows of mud huts; and beyond them the bare, flat desert — stone and sand, with a sparse coating of herbage. What can he think of but how to get away?

For our part we seemed unlikely ever to get away, so hopelessly had mules and motors failed us: and we awoke in dire discontent; I almost in despair of reaching Oruro in time to be of any use, and M. R. full of wrath against his men for having failed him. We dressed; ate sour rolls and butter—tinned butter now, and continuously for the remainder of my trip—drank coffee; and went out to see if things were any better.

They were. M. R.'s carriage and mules had already appeared, having as a matter of fact been waiting for him nearly a week at a farm close by. And as for me, I escaped disaster once more by a hair's-breadth. For by a lucky chance M. R. discovered that there was after all a *coche* in the village waiting to convey an Austrian priest to Atocha, which as the nearest point of the Bolivian railway system was also my destination; and in it was a vacant seat which I could have—if I cared to travel with the priest. The landlord, a very decent fellow, seemed to be much perturbed on this point—whether because he

was an Austrian or because he was a priest I did not make out, but believe it was the latter—and expressed his doubts with great deference to M. R., and so to me. I replied that I would travel with the priest's Principal Adversary if necessary, but at all costs I would travel. M. R. very kindly made all my arrangements for me. I was to pay 115 bolivianos, (about £12) for myself and my luggage; was to start at ten o'clock; and in three days, according to the *cochero* and owner of the mules, I should be in Atocha.

This gentleman, Mr Segobia, gave me to think at first that the Bolivian peasant could show the way to any Hebrew in the matter of a deal, and to any Irishman in the matter of fair promises. For if a motor under the best conditions could only cover the distance in two days, and under the existing conditions could not cover it at all, how could a *coche* hope to do it in three? I expressed doubts; and M. R. made inquiries. In vain, however. Every one assured us that Mr Segobia was a man of the very highest principles, and would certainly carry out any promise he had made. "He is a good man," said one old gentleman with solemn finality and not without a touch of indignation. "He is a *good* man. He feeds his mules." All agreed. And after a testimony so tremendous—and indeed unique I believe for South America—I felt that my doubts were altogether unworthy, and that so rare a man might be trusted to carry the Bank of England to Atocha—supposing the Bank ever wanted to go.

Presently the *coche* appeared: and I must admit that I was moved to prayer at the sight of it; prayer that the priest might be a man of modest

proportions, since I am not. Imagine a small dray on wheels, the kind of thing you would give to a large child to play with; two small garden-seats superimposed; and over all a light canopy of canvas. On the front seat I reckoned there was about room for Mr Segobia and a suit-case, and on the back room for about 1·25 of me. If the priest were more than the merest wraith of a man where was he going to go? Or worse still—for he would get first turn—where was I, even the decimal part of me, to go? Involuntarily the mind recalled all the tales it had read and the songs it had heard of the merry lives enjoyed by some members of the Roman hierarchy—'*A Jovial Monk am I*,' '*I am a Friar of Orders Grey*,' and the like. And as I thought of the miles between me and Atocha my heart became as water within me. Surely, surely, I thought, such people could not exist now; they must be more austere. But there was no knowing; and M. R. did not make things better by telling me that the 'road' lay almost entirely up the beds of rivers and that these rivers were only too likely to be in flood just now. You may ask, as I did, why it lay up the beds of rivers, and whether there were no alternative route. But the answer was quite simple and convincing. There are no roads in Bolivia; and in this part of it that which is not river-bed is nearly all steep mountain: so if you do not travel by river-bed you cannot travel at all.

I was ready for Mr Segobia at ten o'clock; and punctually at half-past twelve he appeared, strenuously belabouring the three mules who drew his *coche*. In it sat the priest, whose proportions I scanned with a quick and jealous eye—and found,

alas, to be anything but modest. No; it was all as bad as could be. He was big; even 'unjustly big,' like De Quincey's fellow-traveller in the stage-coach. Not fat; that would have been a 'bull' point in more senses than one, for fat gives and may be a good neighbour; but tall, broad, dignified and decidedly muscular. If we jostled, as jostle we must, there would be no comfortable upholstery-work on him. But on the other hand his face was far the finest I had seen since I left England, and one of the finest I have ever seen anywhere. And as he shook hands and spoke to me with a smile of our being '*enemicos*' I knew that we should be very good friends—so far, that is, as friendship is possible between sardines.

Mr Segobia was little inferior to the priest in point of size, a considerable man both in height and girth, with a pleasant burnt-sienna face, a big felt hat, a khaki coat, blue trousers, and gaiters. He smiled genially upon us, evidently pleased at having kept to his time so well. Then, as though he were not already late enough—and large enough—he proceeded, instead of taking any steps towards beginning the journey, to dismount from his perch, make his way into the restaurant of the hotel, and settle himself down comfortably to a gigantic meal. Had I been set to eat that meal I should have taken at least an hour over it, and if alive at the end should have had enough to carry me not only to Atocha but to the North Pole. To Mr Segobia, however, there appeared to have been granted the powers of a dog in assimilation, so unequally do the gods bestow their gifts; and in less than five minutes he was outside his disgusting collection of stew and leathery cheese, and ready

for the road. What would I not give for his talent!

Then it appeared that some of his pack-mules had strayed; and another quarter-of-an-hour passed before they reappeared, driven with earnest blasphemy by a ragged sixteen-year-old boy on a pony. Then came the process of loading up. My portmanteau and my camp-bed, weighing about 180 lb. in all, were lashed with goatskin thongs on to one mule. Various *equipajes* (luggage) belonging to various parties known and unknown were lashed on to others. And my suit-case and the priest's were tied on behind the *coche*. All this with a care and a superfluity of thongs as though we were going by aeroplane to the moon and were going to loop the loop on the way. Then at last, some three hours late, we actually started, with great cracking of whips and "Hoo-la! Hoo-la!" "A—a—y!" to the mules; and we jolted and tumbled rather than drove down into a deep gully and out again on the other side.

After all this and after the meticulous care that had been taken to make our luggage almost a part of the mules' anatomy it was certainly a little disappointing to find that even yet we had not really started. We stopped. Mr Segobia descended from his perch, detached every morsel of luggage from the *coche* and the mules as carefully as he had put it on, and laid everything down in a row on the ground before a white house. It was then that I beheld the word 'Aduana' above the house and understood. Though only an hour or two had passed and only three hundred yards had been covered since we had had our baggage ruthlessly inspected by an Argentine official because we were leaving Argentina,

yet now we must once more have it inspected by a Bolivian official because we were entering Bolivia—as crazy a waste of time and trouble as even South America can show. However, the Bolivian official was at least quick and superficial; and it was probably not much more than three-quarters of an hour later that we took the road once more, this time not to be detained.

The way—I cannot call it a road—lay over a plain of sand, shale, boulders and mud, very sparsely covered with a kind of large heather.

Mr Segobia sat in front plying word and whip unceasingly upon the mules. The priest and I sat behind, feeling though possibly not looking like flowers pressed between the pages of a book; conversing very lamely though amicably in English (which he did not understand) and Spanish (which I did not); laughing immoderately over our efforts; and trying in vain not to behave like billiard-balls to each other as the 'road' played us from side to side. I suppose you will say that nobody can feel like a pressed flower and also like a billiard-ball in the same sentence; but I can assure you it is only too easy in the same *coche*. Luckily the pace was not severe; more often a shamble than a trot, and more often a crawl than either; so 'cannons' were not too frequent; and quite often the way led in and out of a river at the bottom of a gully, so that we were able to walk for a time and so relieve the pressure.

The plain was entirely uninteresting save for one feature, which must surely be unique—namely, a railway-track without any rails on it. For miles north of La Quiaca this track was built several years ago with a view to linking up the Argentine and

Bolivian railway systems. Then the builders' resources came to an end; and now wherever you go on this plain you see it winding about, with its embankments, cuttings, culverts, signals, station buildings, water-tanks and everything complete—except rails. In the ordinary fashion of South America one rail would have been laid by the generation succeeding ours and the other by the one after that; engines and rolling stock would have been collected by their seed after them; and so in a century or two the line would have been triumphantly set to work. As it is, I am told that at last the Bolivian Government has decided to take over what has been built and complete the link between the two systems. It will be an expensive luxury; for the country hereabouts is practically all desert; the engineering difficulties will be immense; and the running costs terrific—I am told they already amount to eleven times those prevalent in the Argentine. But no doubt it will prove good policy in the long run. There is much in the Argentine that Bolivia wants; much too to be gained by increased trade and closer relations between the two countries. And surely any expenditure must be well worth undertaking which will make it easier to get out of Bolivia. Others may differ on this point. For my part I did not take long to make up my mind.

For hours we bumped and jostled over this plain. Then about half-past-five we came into the midst of a tremendous thunder-storm, which had been booming and flashing round us for some time. I had been told—and now of course recalled—some fearful stories about thunder in Bolivia: how the lightning bursts and crackles round you like a barrage of shells; how the whole ground becomes

a sheet of blue flame; and how the only thing to do is to crouch in a hollow of the rock or the earth and pray that the current may not come your way. Awful indeed are the effects of lightning at this altitude with its rarefied atmosphere; and in some regions hardly a day passes without its storm, almost always in the afternoon; you can reckon almost infallibly on a fine morning and thunder about four o'clock. Luckily our storm, but for the rain, proved a very mild affair after all; but this came down as though a great sea had been raised to heaven and then dropped. We happened luckily to be close to a native village; and there in a 'farm-house' with some friends of Mr Segobia we took shelter. The farm-house was not extensive, consisting in fact of but one big room built of mud, floored with mud, and lined with newspapers mainly of the Victorian era. Among the latter, however, was a large coloured portrait of the present Queen of Spain; and I was told by the priest that you will hardly find a native house in Bolivia without a similar portrait, such is their respect for the idea of royalty.

I cannot say that their respect for cleanliness was quite on the same level. Nor given an invitation to 'dine and sleep,' would I accept it without demur. For there was in fact but one bed, and in that, so far as I could gather, at least seven people must lie —father, mother, grandmother, grown-up daughter and three children, not to mention that which is smaller than children. They all looked well and thriving, however; wonderful testimony to the conditions under which the human race can flourish.

Other individuals of various colours and nationalities, Spanish, Portuguese or Bolivian, drifted in

to this farm while we took shelter, all on mules; and I gathered that all were more or less under Mr Segobia's chaperonage, and all were going to Atocha: but as none could speak English I could not converse with them much, and we simply stood and looked at each other till the rain stopped. Then on we went, and drove for another hour or so to the edge of the plateau. There the formation of the ground suddenly changed; and we looked down on a gigantic expanse of gullies, ravines, water-courses, and hillocks, the red earth tossed into a fantastic and bewildering variety of cones, spikes, and upstanding knives and pillars—a most remarkable sight. Heavy rain and darkness soon blotted this out; and we began to descend into the valley. Mr Segobia plied the whip unceasingly. For the first time the mules rose to a continuous trot; and the priest and I began to make discoveries hitherto unsuspected about each other's anatomy. Some three hours of this ensued; we had expected one, and they seemed a dozen. Then about nine-thirty we arrived at the collection of mud huts known as Nazarenos; and pulling up at what seemed the smallest and muddiest of all, beheld over the door "Grand Hotel de Milan" or "Naples," I forget which. Here we were to sleep—if we could.

The Grand Hotel was in the Italian style, and kept by Italians. It had an immense porch; a tiny courtyard with a bed of flowers in the middle; a dining-'saloon' (about twelve feet by eight), and three bedrooms. Mine, and I suppose the others, had a dirty stone floor, two beds, a chair and a basin, and that was all. At least I hoped that was all; but did not spare insect-powder. Our reception was all smiles and courtesy; and we were duly

provided with food—a medley, which I can still taste and smell, of tough meat, macaroni, grease, rice and onions. Landlord and all his family—there seemed to be at least twelve—crowded into the room to watch us eat; and there remained and stood in stony silence save for an occasional whisper and a much more than occasional 'spit.' Then Mr Segobia came in; and, so far as I could gather, began to speak of going on on the morrow. At any rate the entire company set up a shriek of laughter; pointed to their throats as though to indicate the level of the river (Rio Grande) through which we must pass; and generally behaved as though a joke worth having had come their way. They seemed indeed to have only too good reason for their mirth, judging by the weather; and once more my heart became as water, and I began to have visions of being kept at the Grand Hotel not only for days but for weeks or months together, unable to go either forward or back. If I got to Oruro within a week of the appointed time I felt now that I should be exceedingly lucky. And so to bed for the fifth night in succession thoroughly anxious and depressed.

XI

The morning once more brought a slightly better outlook. Mr Segobia had been down to see the river, found that it was going down, and thought that in a couple of hours it might be worth while starting, though he could not say how far we should get. I gathered from the priest that we had at least eight or nine crossings to make during the day, all difficult and some perhaps impossible; so it was useless to think of hurrying. We were entirely in the hands of "Rio Grande."

We waited therefore till about half-past nine; then shambled down to the river-side and crossed several small channels without difficulty. The main channel proved more serious, the water rising well above the floor of the *coche*, and the priest and I only keeping dry by holding our legs high above it against the front seat. The mules, in the nature of mules, felt that they must stop; and did so half-way through the stream, if for nothing else *pour se faire valoir*. But the only result was that they had an extra allowance of whip to remind them of the beauty of obedience, and thus stimulated had no difficulty in reaching the opposite shore. If there were nothing worse than this, thought I, why so much fuss? And when a little later we came to a group of huts and Mr Segobia, who stopped here for refreshments, proposed that we should take on as an additional escort one of the dusky gentlemen there resident, Andrés by name, at the

price of 20 bolivianos (about 30s.), I felt that this was going too far altogether, and demurred strongly to the extra expense: had he not contracted, he and no other, to convey us, our souls, bodies and *equipajes*, to Atocha at a fee already sufficient?

The priest seconded. Mr Segobia argued; and so far as I could make out from his shrugging shoulders and upturned hands and eyes argued that this was now impossible, owing to the height of the river; he must have extra help. We in our turn argued; the priest, that is, as 'leader,' and I ready behind him with points. But neither leader nor junior produced the least effect. Mr Segobia continued to gesticulate and gaze at the heavens with the eye of a dying saint, or duck. And we might have been arguing still had not M. R. most opportunely appeared at this moment—on a mule now, he had abandoned his *coche*—and settled the case for, or rather against, us in the twinkling of an eye. Most certainly, he held, we must have an extra man. The crossings would be very difficult if not impassable for a *coche*; and Mr Segobia was quite right to insist on extra help. We took his advice therefore; set to work to bargain with Mr Andrés for a lower fee—Mr Segobia apparently more on his side than ours—and managed to reduce it to 9 bolivianos (about 15s.), which seemed to us quite enough for a short day's work. We were to be only too glad when we came to paying him to raise this to twelve.

We left the river now; and for an hour or so went up and down ridges of shaly rock on a road which for once did not suggest a railway with sleepers but without rails. Then we came down a steep hill to

the second crossing; and I realised at once why Mr Segobia had asked for help. Here instead of wandering down a space about half-a-mile broad the river was concentrated into a channel not more than thirty yards in width, down which it was tearing at a furious pace; swirling into waves, roaring as it set the boulders rolling in its bed and measuring, one guessed, at least three feet deep in the middle, little less anywhere except at the edges. The bed, I gathered, was possibly alive with quicksands; but no one knew if they were there or not, or, if so, where. No wonder Mr Segobia had asked for help! And no wonder he and Andrés spent some time gazing at the water and debating whether to attempt it or not.

This debate was presently joined by a peon whose house lay close by, and whose income was derived presumably from fishing people out of the river, for barring a small hut he seemed to have no other means of subsistence.

For hours, as it seemed, they talked and gesticulated wildly towards the river. Then suddenly they ceased talking and took action. Andrés mounted his mule and forced it into the river. Inch by inch it began to feel its way across. The water rose to the saddle. The mule halted. The rider kicked. The mule went on. Now they were in the full force of the current. At any moment they might disappear floundering in a quicksand. But on they went without mishap, and soon were safe on the opposite bank—a matter of no small relief to us who looked on and realised something of the difficulties. Andrés then rode back. The three engaged in further debate; then decided apparently to make the attempt with the *coche*; and we took

our seats, raised our feet as high as possible nursing our hand-bags on our knees, and started.

We seemed to drop rather than drive into the water, so steep was the bank; and at once found ourselves in the full force of the current, racing and swirling through the *coche* just below our seats, and seeming likely every moment to snatch us away like jetsam, ourselves, the mules, the *coche* and all. Andrés started riding slightly ahead of us, but soon had to come back and join with Mr Segobia in a furious assault upon the mules. (This may sound very cruel, but I do not think it really was; for it takes a great deal to hurt a mule, and if they had been really hurt they could and would have moved very much quicker than they did.) Cruelty or no, they seemed to expect the whip, for they would not stir without it, and when they did it was so slowly that we could hardly tell we were moving. Inch by inch they were lashed into mid-stream. Then where the current seemed deeper and stronger than ever they came to a dead stop, thoroughly scared no doubt and convinced that they were being asked to do more than they possibly could—at any rate far more than they would. Whack—whack—whack went the whips again; and at length they seemed to conclude that anything would be better than remaining *in situ*, and bestirred themselves to struggle forward a few more yards. Then, however, the point seemed to arrive when anything would be better than going on; and they stopped finally, still in mid-stream, and looked as plainly as speech could have made it the word 'Na-poo.' In vain did the men search them with whip and word. They would not stir; no, not an inch, even to escape punishment; and the question arose, what next?

Were I and the priest—in his hat and cassock—to wade ashore swathed in red slime, carrying our hand-bags? Or were we to remain there, an island—and decidedly a desert island—till the waters abated?

We did not know. Nor did Mr Segobia apparently; at any rate he looked and no doubt was entirely flummoxed. But fortunately for us a more resourceful gentleman was at hand, a friend of Sophocles, Æschylus, Euripides, and many other tragedians—namely *deus ex machina.* Out of the water beside us as it seemed there arose a dusky form, that of the peon who lived on the bank—and did not need to cultivate it. Fiercely he pointed to his shoulders. From the priest and Mr Segobia I gathered amid the roar of the river that he designed to carry us ashore—a scheme laughable in my eyes, for it looked quite a big enough job to carry oneself ashore in that raging water. However, he was plainly serious. Indeed before I had finished laughing he had actually persuaded the priest to embark; and I found myself alone in my seat wondering if reft of that sheet-anchor, his weight, the *coche* would remain where it was. To my relief it did, and I was able to watch the progress of '*deus*' and his load. With one hand on the priest and the other on the bristly mane of Andrés' mule, which was ridden very carefully beside him, he staggered forward. He stopped. He moved again. Plainly the strain was terrific, and but for the mule he must have gone under. As it was, he stopped every two or three paces to get breath. But despite the torrent, and the stony, irregular footing and the top-heavy load above him he did struggle on; and ultimately delivered his goods untouched by water

on the farther bank, truly a wonderful feat of strength.

Then he came back for me ; and I will wager that no man living to-day knows as well as he the number of pounds there are in fourteen stone. I felt like a ton of potatoes on stilts made of straw, and shall never cease to wonder *why* 'The Lord delighteth not in any man's legs.' Then he returned for our luggage. Then he and Andrés went for the mules, in more senses than one. And either their renewed efforts or the diminished load soon produced their effect, and the beasts drew the *coche* and Mr Segobia light-heartedly out of the river, proving to their own satisfaction if not to ours that they had previously been asked to achieve the impossible.

That was one crossing. There were eight more like it during the day. None quite so bad, for at no other was there danger of quicksands. But at all it was a toss-up if we should get over or not, even on mules—we did not make the attempt in the *coche* again. And at one we saw a pack-mule go down in mid-stream and fail to get up again. Gradually its head sank to the water-level, then below it, and failed to reappear. "West," we thought, and wondered whose luggage lay under it. But we did not know Bolivia. '*Deus*' seems always present: what a country for dramatists! At any rate out of the ground beside us—I will swear that no one was in sight before—arose another peon. In a flash he shed what had once been trousers—though why I do not know; it could hardly have been to secure greater freedom of movement—and in a shirt that barely reached his middle went hot-foot to the rescue. He grasped the mule's head,

held it aloft till it had got some air instead of water into its lungs, and so enabled it to struggle up again and make the farther bank. There it stood for a while meditating on Death and Resurrection, and whether the latter is worth while, and generally upon the hard case of mules in South America. Then on again sulky as before, as if nothing out of the way had happened.

Fortunately my own baggage-mule like almost all the others had made it plain two days ago that it had no intention of keeping up with the main convoy. Baggage-mules never do in Bolivia: it is not done. And they know as well as you or I that no one cares. To-morrow or next day or the week after, it is all the same in South America—except to the man who comes from another country. As it happened, I was rather relieved than otherwise at their non-appearance; for the worry of getting myself and—far more important—my paper money through eight or nine fords unsoused would have been nothing to that of seeing my goods and chattels go over on the back of a mule who would not trouble to lift up his feet. A ducking would have done me no harm, and perhaps only made my bank-notes a shade filthier than they were before. But a stay of some minutes under water with a strong mixture of red slime would have worked ruin on my bed, clothes, papers and other things on which I depended for the next few months.

All along the river there were weeping willows at intervals on both sides, most beautiful to see; and whenever there was room between the channel and the bare red hills there were little fields of maize or barley flashing green amid the desert. At one place we went through a passage only a few yards

wide between precipitous rocks; and here there was a tablet cut in the cliff which we were invited to stop and inspect. We did so, thinking that here must have been the Armageddon of Bolivia and on this tablet would be engraved the names of heroes who had fallen at this historic pass. We, at any rate I, could make nothing of it at the time. But I heard afterwards that far from being what we thought it was simply the effort of a local 'prefect' or something of that sort to commemorate his term of office. He was inspected or visited during this term by a brighter star whose orbit included this district; and thinking to add reflected glory to his own rays he recorded the event magnificently in stone. Rumour adds that he subsequently sent in the bill to the brighter star, but does not say who paid.

Not long after leaving this advertisement we found the valley growing broader, the fields more spacious and the borders of weeping willow more and more continuous; and knew that we were approaching our next stopping-place, the town of Tupiza. Soon it showed up white and lovely among the willows; and I thought: "What a jolly place to stay at." The gods were to punish me shrewdly for that thought.

XII

The streets of Tupiza, we found, were paved with boulders rather more than less loosely set together than those in the bed of the river. Over these we jolted and bumped with more 'cannons' than we had visited on each other throughout our journey; and finally arrived at the Plaza, a thing as essential to a Spanish American town as a '*bar y billares*,' and far more important in the public eye than such details as sanitation and good water, from lack of which people die by the thousand every year. Before a 'hotel' in or about this Plaza, which we will call 'de la Buena Vista'—for that was not its name—Mr Segobia drew up with a flourish, as though his mules were good for another hundred miles instead of being, or at any rate appearing on the brink of dissolution; and right gladly we left his *coche*.

This 'hotel' consisted as usual of a dining-room, a bar, and six or eight bedrooms ranged round a yard; all built of mud, roofed with iron, and papered and carpeted with—I was going to say dirt, but presumably there was a subsoil of some kind beneath it, and if you dug deep enough you would find it. As, usual there was nowhere to sit except in the bedrooms; and as usual these bedrooms had no light except through the upper half of the folding doors, nor air except when these doors were open. That they had ever been open since the house was built was difficult to believe. Mine at any rate recalled so sharply the presence of previous occupants—whether men or poultry I cannot say,

and it really does not seem to matter in Bolivia —that I had perforce to hurry out and buy— what do you think? Why, a bottle of scent. I suppose you will say that I am the only man 'as calls hisself a man' who has ever bought a bottle of scent; and in ordinary circumstances I should certainly agree with you. But before you damn me to eternity I do ask you just to go to Tupiza; see or rather smell what my bedroom was like; and judge how long you could have sat in it, let alone slept without external aid. Not five minutes, I assure you. And just as a very gallant officer once told me that the best friend he ever had in his life was an umbrella which he carried and slept under from end to end of the Boer War, so now I declare to you that no one, man or woman, has ever been to me what that bottle was in Bolivia. I really believe it saved my life.

To be strictly impartial once more and show you that there were two sides to the question, I quote again the heading of the hotel note-paper, which will indicate what was no doubt the fact, that the landlord sincerely believed himself to be in charge of the Ritz of South America. He certainly did his best to 'make it so'; but happy are those who do not know his best.

SERVICIO DE BAR Y BILLARES
VINOS Y LICORES DE LAS MEJORES MARCAS

DEPARTMENTOS
ESPECIALES PARA FAMILIAS
PIEZAS CONFORTABLES DE 1ª Y 2ª CLASE

SERVICIO ESMERADO
COMODIDAD E HIGIENE

The River at Tupiza

On the Way to Atocha

Before I had enjoyed this '*higiene*' ten minutes there arose in an acute form that question which must always be the first to occur to anyone arriving at a small town in South America—namely how to get out of it again. Mr Segobia appeared to discuss the matter; and the priest having left me now for the more cleanly and comfortable quarters of a fellow-priest I had to deal with our *cochero* alone. For a long time he addressed me fluently in the Spanish tongue, gesticulating freely to the north; and I kept repeating "Si, si, si" (Yes, yes, yes), with no less fluency, but with no glimmering of what he meant. After a time it began to dawn upon him that we were not making much progress; and he went and fetched the innkeeper, who addressed me in the same tongue, with the same fluency, and result. Then realising that I was one of the imbeciles who cannot be made to understand the language of human beings, they and others who had now collected round us indicated that they would fetch the one man in Tupiza who could speak 'Ingles'; and before I knew what had happened I was in close converse with a short, bristly-haired, well-drilled man wearing pince-nez, who spoke English with an ingratiating smile and a guttural accent—and did not mention the war. I am bound to say he was a good specimen of his breed if such there be—an engineer who had been employed on the Bolivian railway until 'Der Tag,' and then had been cast off to starve. At any rate he did his utmost to help me; and I could not but accept his services with gratitude and give him to drink.

What he had to tell me was that Mr Segobia could not transport me any farther in the *coche*, the conditions were too bad; and I should have to

do the rest of the journey by mule. Moreover, there had been so much rain of late that it was very doubtful if even on mules we could tackle the river on the morrow. And in any case it seemed we should have tough work to catch the Wednesday's train from Atocha; for that this was Monday; we had to ride eight hours on Tuesday and about eleven on Wednesday; and even if we started at two A.M. of the latter day we should have a big job to get to Atocha by three P.M., when the train was due to start.

This was another 'crash'; for among the hazy impressions which my ignorance of Spanish had allowed me to gather about my journey I had formed a very clear impression that Atocha was only a short day's journey from Tupiza, and that I ought to reach it quite easily on the morrow. Now it seemed I should not only not do that, but I might easily be too late for Wednesday's train. That meant waiting till Sunday's, for there were only two trains a week: and that meant that I should be at any rate a week late at Oruro, and cause a great deal of inconvenience to the brothers Martin not to mention infinite exasperation to myself. Most emphatically therefore I insisted that we must go on on the morrow whatever the conditions. Mr Segobia answered by shrugging his shoulders to the point where they seemed likely to engulf his head, turning up the palms of his hands in mute appeal to Providence, and viewing the heavens with the eyes of a martyr. No doubt also he breathed a silent prayer for deliverance from the mentally deficient of all countries especially England, though this I was not privileged to hear. However, after some argument I did get an assurance through our inter-

preter that he would make the attempt on the morrow; if there were no more rain it might be just possible for us to get through; and with this, whether he meant it or not, I had to be content.

After a supper which I can still remember—gutta-percha mutton stewed in rice with foul sauce and reeking onions—I went to bed more depressed than ever; but not forgetting you may be sure to be lavish with insect powder and scent. I read. I tried to sleep. I failed, partly through worry, partly through sheer stink. I listened anxiously for the sound of rain, for if any fell to-night our chances were *nil* on the morrow; and till midnight heard not a whisper. Then, however, there began a gentle murmur, not even audible on the iron roof; and I looked out and found that there was a sort of Scotch mist going on, hardly to be called rain. 'No harm,' thought I and returned to bed, where I lay awake perhaps another half-an-hour or so, listening though hardly fearing lest it should become more serious. It did. About one o'clock it gradually grew louder and louder, and finally became a deluge which destroyed all chance of starting on the morrow. I do not know how long it lasted; probably all night. What I heard before going to sleep was enough for me. It meant three extra days on the journey, either in this hen-house of Tupiza or else if they existed in still murkier quarters. No wonder South America has no saints of her own, but has had to borrow them from the Old World.

As though to mock us next morning was brilliantly fine, but the river of course quite impassable, and I had to resign myself to spending the day either in the hen-house or else in the streets. There were two of the latter, I found, running from end to end of

the town, about half-a-mile in length, and several short ones at right angles thereto. All the latter ran at one end into the river, which here makes a considerable bend, and at the other into the bare hills which wedge the town in from behind. Tupiza cannot grow, for there is nowhere for it to grow to. Nor does it want to, apparently. There are shops, it is true; Government offices; a large and hideous church; the Plaza; a bank; two or three 'hotels'; and most important of all the offices of the Aramayo-Francke Mining Company which has mines in the district. There is also a railway-station. But I need hardly add that there are no rails; no, nor even a promise of their coming as there was on the plateau we had travelled. As far as Nazarenōs we had traced the ambitions of this railway; but in the Tupiza valley there were not even these, so that the station seems likely to have a very long engagement before it acquires its natural mate, a train. Till it does the town will remain what it is, sleepy, inactive, filthy and most lovely to see, with its white houses, wide expanse of river-bed, green corn-fields, sharp hills and crowd of weeping willows. One may safely add that it will also remain like that after the railway comes, and also for ever and ever.

There is no difficulty about seeing its life, such as it is. The tailor, the carpenter, the harness-maker, each plies his craft in a single room opening on to the street, which is probably his bedroom too. The mules of the Aramayo Company and other traffickers wander along the streets. At the Government offices there are sentinels who wake with a start when you approach and prevent you from exploring the exceedingly picturesque old courtyard round which

the offices are grouped. In the Plaza, a tiny square of eucalyptus-trees, there are shrubs and plants kept alive by constant watering in the dry season; there is a band-stand; and there are seats, so constantly occupied that you feel they must be taken like boxes at the opera at a certain figure for the season — the season being the entire year. The mails between Bolivia and the Argentine pass through here—when the river permits—and also telegrams—when the operators remember them. But, as I have indicated, neither method of communication is regarded very seriously in South America: if they happen to be noticed they go; if not, not. And in the case of telegrams this does not matter nearly so much as you might think; for if they ever reach their destination, it is usually in so mutilated a form that no one can make head or tail of them; and so the matter of their dispatch or arrival is relatively speaking unimportant.

Having explored the town you may go a little way outside it and there see Balbus building a wall. He makes a great mud-pie of shale and such clay as he can find; brings a frame-work of boards some four feet by two by two deep, and fills it in with the mud-pie; gives it a few days in which to dry, and then takes the boards away. On top of this pie he makes another, and another as high as he needs, and so his wall is built. *Mutatis mutandis* he builds his house in much the same way; and very good houses they are too, though not popular with insurance companies, because they will not burn and so need no insurance.

Then if you go down to the river when it is in spate you will perceive that here is Blackpool. One by one men come out to take what is presumably

their annual dip. The water is mainly red slime, and hardly reaches up to their middles, so that the gain is not large; but presumably they emerge a trifle cleaner than they went in—at any rate one hopes so. The ladies do not bathe, but any day you may see some of them fording the river. They take off their boots—they do not possess stockings. They hoist their garments—garment, perhaps I should say, for they all seem to be 'widows without encumbrances'—hoist them, I say, to the waist-line if need be, trusting to the water to clothe them. They wade. And lo, in a moment they are through it and the curtain is dropped, and they nod and smile at you, "Buenas dias, Señor," "Buenas dias, Señora," and pass on.

Throughout that first day the sun blazed with tropical heat, and though there was a constant threat of rain in the north none fell, and I thought contentedly 'To-morrow at any rate we really shall get on.' Nor, please to observe, did I do so without due precaution. On the contrary, I am a man so humbled by experience that I never venture even to think hopefully without a firm grasp of wood; nine times out of ten you will find it by my bed-side lest I wake in the night with a boastful thought. And when I hoped this hope you may be sure there was wood in either hand. But alas, it availed me nothing. That night, as on the previous night, I listened, and worried, and listened; and again worried; and again till midnight heard no sound of rain. And then as before there came a whisper and a patter, and gradually but only too surely a roar of falling waters. The sky had been rent apart; the river would again be impassable; and yet another day must be spent in Tupiza.

That was the moment, I think, when I first began to realise what 'travel' means in South America. Never for one instant—that is what it means—can you be sure of getting anywhere within an appointed time, or indeed any time whatever. Strikes, floods, revolutions, landslips, earthquakes—any or all of these may descend upon you at any moment and scatter to the wind your most carefully laid plans. It is useless to fight; they are part of your fate, and you must submit with what patience you can. No one of course who lives on this continent ever expects anything else: *mañana* is part of their existence. But to one coming fresh from England it is impossible at first to realise how suddenly and completely his journey may be upset; and until he does so and makes up his mind to philosophise he will furnish inexhaustible laughter to the gods. I, for example, with my ideas of getting to Oruro within a certain time must have seemed to them a perfect 'scream.' I was learning now. But they had not done with me yet.

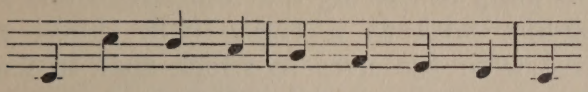
The second day was like unto the first, and so was the night. I need say no more.

On the morning of the third, there being by now some half-dozen of us waiting to go on, we persuaded Mr Segobia with some difficulty to make an effort; and we all packed food, mounted mules, and started off at dawn up the river-bed, hoping against hope that we might be able to pull through. We hoped in vain. Hardly had we travelled a mile before the water began to rise, suddenly and so considerably that there could be no question of going on. We had indeed to seek the bank for safety and there remain some two hours before the torrent went down. Even then we did not get

home without some difficulty. And gruesome indeed were the hours that followed. For I now learned that on occasion people had been kept waiting here not less than six weeks by persistent floods, and this was just the beginning of the rainy season! If it went on I really might be kept here all that time; and in that case I might just as well not have left England at all. I had something to say, I can assure you, about the river and the elements just then. But far more freely did I revile the incompetence and fecklessness of Man, who in all the centuries he has lived at Tupiza has never taken the trouble, though liable at any moment thus to be cut off from the world, to find or make an alternative route. Could his flabbiness I wondered be matched in any other corner of that world?

A third day then I spent in Tupiza, whose lure in my eyes had not survived the first; and though I did not go mad I could not help thinking of the number of people who must have done so in the history of South America. There was nothing whatever to do except to read, which I could not do indoors—the hen-house was too full of reminiscences—and to walk, and worry about the river. It went down considerably during this day; and again the sun blazed and there was no drop of rain. But I was without illusions now; I knew what would happen during the night, and should not have been surprised if it happened every night for a couple of years. As it chanced the evening was quite dry; and both it and the early night showed promise, though both were rendered even more insufferable than usual by the performance of the town band, which in honour of Christmas Eve paraded the

streets from an early till an incalculably late hour, playing the one tune it knew—namely,



This phrase it repeated in unison and without cessation as long as I remained awake on every kind of instrument capable of producing a shrill noise. And if you say, 'Why not close your window and shut out the noise?' I ask you once more to go to Tupiza and see what I should have had to shut in. In the end I did shut it out, being by nature distraught by the slightest noise, but comparatively inured by now to the most terrestrial smell. I cannot say that having shut one devil in I managed to shut the other out, but there was some respite at any rate from the latter. And there was too one other good point about this night, namely that as long as I lay awake, till after midnight, there was no rain not even a whisper or a drop. I nourished no hopes, knowing what previous nights had done. But even a few hours of abstention were something; and I prayed most earnestly that they might be prolonged.

They were prolonged. Yes. Even to one who waits in Tupiza the end must come some day. I woke at five to find Mr Segobia and his staff already in the courtyard; yes and even the baggage-mules, which had appeared mysteriously from nowhere; and there was a great stir of packing and loading and buying food. The latter, I was told, was most essential; for our first night's sojourn would be at a hut where nothing but water was procurable. So I laid in such tinned food as I could get—all at gigantic

cost, because of the distance of Tupiza from the haunts of men—and revelling in the bright sun and the glory of leaving that adhesive town I took the saddle without a care, little thinking how frightful were the uses to which that instrument might be put by the hand of Fate.

XIII

The process of saddling and loading and girthing and re-girthing the mules till they looked like hour-glasses—and then needed 'pinching' again half-an-hour later—came to an end about six o'clock, and one by one a company of some three dozen—men and animals—trickled out on to the road and began the journey. There were six or seven Bolivians or Spaniards of the better sort; I do not know which, and anyhow their sort was not superlative. There were Mr Segobia, his satellites and his friends to the number of three or four. And there were baggage-mules and spare mules and a lot of other mules not apparently of his company, but making the journey as parcel-vans under his command.

The river was lower than I had yet seen it but in places still up to our mules' bellies, and little less swift than on the previous day; so that they had always to feel their way inch by inch across a channel, and even then stumbled frequently in mid-stream. If there be a more precarious and maddening vehicle on the earth than a small mule—and all Mr Segobia's mules were small—I have yet to meet it; but I cannot believe that such a thing exists. Never even on the flat do they seem equal to their work—any work, that is, not only the work of conveying fourteen stone. Never for an instant will they look where they are going, or take the least trouble to lift up their feet. Never as a result do they get through five minutes without a 'peck.'

And when it comes to fording a river, say even two to three feet deep, you feel about as secure on them as you would on the back of a small goat. Whack—whack—whack is the only thing to do. And even that is of very little use. In South America you are equipped with a whip-lash as part of your reins—one rein, that is, is continued in the form of a thong—and with this you are supposed to be able to achieve any results that can be achieved by whacking. But in practice a wand of paper would be about as much use. There is no form of ill-treatment to be devised with it which has not long ago been discounted and rendered laughable in the eyes of a mule by the constant ill-treatment to which he has been subjected from birth. And unless you have a stick, as I luckily had, and use it persistently he will crawl along just at the pace he chooses, sulky, feeble, idle, unwilling, and constantly stumbling. Sure-footed he may be on a mountain-side, where care is necessary; but on the flat—may the gods forgive him, for I will not. Charity never travelled upon a mule.

Our way led as a matter of course up the bed of the river; and this bed was as usual flat, broad and uninteresting, bounded by hills of bare red earth, and only varied by a hut now and then or a rare flash of green corn where someone had filched a little land from the river. The sun blazed with merciless vigour upon the head and back. The gait of the mule, short, trivial, shuffling, slow, became more and more exasperating. And not to conceal that which he only confesses with shame and disgust, the Chief Ass became aware, when barely two hours had passed, that he was already cooked and ready to be served up before any who wished to consume

him. His saddle appeared to be made of specially hardened wood shaped like the letter V set fore and aft. Not knowing what was in store for him, he had not, like others, taken the precaution of filling up the lower part of this crevice with blankets. His stirrups, great wooden clogs, were yet not great enough to admit more than one or two of his toes. His knees, which had more than a nodding acquaintance with arthritis, seemed as though they had taken a permanent crook, and ached aloud except where they were completely numb. His back, in which he had been wont to repose confidence, sagged like that of Age itself. His efforts to escape one set of aches or sores by varying his position only seemed to introduce him to another set. And to gain relief by walking was practically impossible; for in order to make the best of the river's curves the route lay constantly through channels of water, and it would have been necessary either to get off and on again at each—a great weariness to the flesh—or else to risk a very wet seat, a drawback of more complex possibilities. It is well that some scribe has written of the journey from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso before the Transandine railway was built: "Travellers who are not accustomed to it may find the long mule-ride rather a painful process." They did; I can vouch for that. And this was Christmas Day! Not the best I have spent.

I suppose I must have sagged rather seriously, for I noticed that my fellow-travellers were thoroughly amused; and I cannot believe that they would have smiled so freely except at the misfortune of others. You may think this very cynical; but the fact is that South American ideas of humour are not the same as ours. Try chaff on them, for

example, and there is quite a chance you will get a knife between your ribs; you have insulted them, and that is all about it. I sagged then, and the others smiled; and so hour after hour we went on, without any halt except now and then to tighten a girth. It was half-past two, eight and a half hours after starting, when we at length arrived at a farm very near the source of the river, and I learned that here we were to sleep. There was a mud hut about fifteen feet by ten; a 'store'; one or two cattle sheds; and something that seemed once to have been a church, for it possessed a sort of rack, also built of mud, on which a bell might once have hung.

We set to work to eat such food as we had, and to drink—the gods be praised—such quantities of lager beer (from La Paz) as I could hardly describe in one book. How much we drank I do not know; but I do know that I alone could have consumed the whole output of that brewery for a year and should still have been thirsty. When at last we had done eating and drinking my fellow-travellers (whether Spanish or Bolivian) took possession of the flat oblong banks of earth inside the hut which were to form their beds; undid and spread out such bedding as they had with them, and lay down. I also put out my camp-bed, for whose presence I shall never cease to be grateful; and given a chance would have slept the sleep of exhaustion. But my friends were too much for me. When they were not talking and laughing like children all at once, they were spitting and investigating their bronchial tubes with unremitting energy; and cooked as I was I could not stay in the same room with them, and had to go out and gain such rest as I could on

the hill-side or the bank of the river, which I can assure them was quite a different thing.

This lasted till dusk. Then we gathered round a diminutive table in the hut, the whole eight of us, and consumed another meal, at which I had an opportunity of studying my companions a little more closely. First there was a doctor, of minute stature, who had a few words of English; then there was a seedy-looking youth with orange-coloured hair; and thirdly, another youth. There was a vast, broad man who never ceased talking except to spit. Five and six were a couple of tradesmen, and seven was a small dark man who made himself exceedingly pleasant and useful to me —why I did not make out till next day. He in particular; but all were very polite and did what they could to help me, even offering to rig up a separate table for me with bags and boxes if I liked; but of course I did not like, or at any rate said so. There then round the table, by the light of one candle in a bottle, we ate and drank, conversed in broken fragments of English, French and Spanish, and laughed consumedly over our efforts. They were immensely struck by my camp-bed; and kept on repeating how 'jolie' it was—a sentiment I could cordially endorse, for without it I should have had to sleep beside one or possibly two of them on a bank of earth and in such proximity as only a sardine can know. As it was, I slept very badly, partly from being over-tired and partly owing to the altitude, some twelve thousand feet; and whenever I was awake I heard the sound of solemn spitting still going on, as though the faculty were one which like breathing did not slumber with the brain, but continued as regularly as by day, though

with diminished force. I did not know—did you?—that the Latin-American kept it up all night as well as all day. But he does; and it just shows how much some of us have yet to learn.

We were roused at five o'clock in the morning; and this time I took care to have two blankets placed in the niche of my saddle, so that it looked and felt a little more like a U than a V. Even so it remained a penance, and I did not look forward to a further twelve hours on—or rather in—it, sore and aching as I still was from yesterday's ride. We followed the river for another two hours; then fortunately left it for sloping plains and low hills; and I was able to walk a great part of the way—no *fiesta* under the grilling sun, but at any rate preferable to riding. Hour after hour we rode or walked, and only at one o'clock stopped for a quarter of an hour for food. Then on again, mainly over endless plains of loose sand. The walking muscles and the riding muscles each kept saying to the other, "Na-poo, you must do the rest," and only the Mind replied, "Seven more hours to go," "Six more hours," or whatever it might be. My spine protested gravely that it was forty-six years old that day, as indeed it was, and could not through eternity maintain the alignment of a ramrod. The desert over which we plodded was but a trifle to the desert in my throat. And when we stopped for a few moments at a 'farm,' and each of us had a cup of earthy and disgusting tea, the thirst it generated was rather worse than the thirst that had gone before. After leaving this I learned that there were yet three hours between us and Atocha; and if it were in nature for a man of forty-six years to cry I should promptly have done so and made green a little oasis

in the desert. As it was, I tried walking fast till I was a long way ahead of the main party, then lying down till they caught me up, then riding again for a time, and then repeating the process—a method which had its merits, though it was not 'jolie' walking fast in that loose sand.

At length, about half-past six in the evening, we turned the corner of a hill and beheld on an opposite hill only a mile away some rows of mud huts. "Atocha!" called Mr Segobia, pointing thereto, and such spirit as remained in me leapt at the name. I suppose there are few less attractive places in the world—just the huts aforesaid, the station, a lot of native 'stores' by the railway, and round them the bare brown hills without a trace of vegetation. But no one either in dreams or Art has ever conceived a place more delectable than I found it then—a bower, a glade, a hanging garden, a vision of loveliness and peace. You must ride from Tupiza to Atocha to know what true beauty is.

In sober fact it presented to us first a large mud-walled enclosure on the flat, within which was a hotel; and beside the gate of that enclosure there stood, smiling genially, the dark-haired gentleman who had been so obliging to me on the way, and who had somehow managed to get in miles ahead of us. I regret to say that I did not reward him by turning into his hotel as the others did, for Mr Segobia had other views for me, and still pointed to the hill. Slowly, very slowly, we climbed nearly to the top of this, and there among other huts discovered one which we will call El Hotel Magnifico. Before it I fell rather than dismounted from my mule, dizzy, sore and aching from head to foot, and drank and drank and drank *cerveza negra* (which is the Spanish

for stout, and very good stout too); drank, I say, till I was sated, but I dare not tell you how long that took. I learned that we had come nearly fifty miles since daybreak, and of these I must have walked about thirty, so even a temperance reformer might have forgiven me just then. As it happened no temperance reformer was present—I hope for their own sake that none exist in South America.

XIV

If you can believe it El Hotel Magnifico was less pretentious than any I had seen in Bolivia and also—may I say it—more atrocious. Partly built of mud, partly carved out of the side of the hill it resembled nothing so much as a large dug-out, divided into compartments by walls of earth; and only in two points did it excel over those other 'hotels' of which I have spoken. Firstly no one appeared to want to sleep in it; and so though there were as usual two beds in my compartment which measured some eight feet by eight, no one else competed for the second; and but for the beds I and my baggage had all this space to ourselves. Secondly it had apparently the most considerate landlord who has ever kept an inn on this planet. Never before at any rate have I seen or heard of so delicate an attention as that which graced my bedroom—namely, a metal comb resting in a hank or 'mare's-tail' of greasy hair hung upon the wall. It was plainly intended for the use of visitors and plainly too, from the number of missing teeth, was in constant use. Yes; but say what you will I do like the spirit of that man. "Out here in the wilds," he seems to say, "I cannot give you all that you would get in the palaces of Oruro or La Paz. Admittedly my hotel is not all that I could wish. But this at least I can do for you and I will." And thereby no doubt he earned the gratitude of thousands of his fellow-men—and women—and which of us can say as much? Think

of the knots that comb has dealt with, the scalps to which it has been a comfort, the delight of dusky travellers on finding such a luxury within their reach! No small thing for a man in that position to feel that he is in advance, even in one detail, of such places as the Ritz or the Savoy.

To my surprise there was yet another refinement in my room which I had ceased to look for in South America, namely a window apart from the door. This window gave upon a yard containing various fowl-houses—and other things. And when I saw the number of fowls there resident I could not but think of the number of companions to which each must be 'G.H.Q.'. Even if their leading elements were not already in my dug-out—and for all its kindness I could not help suspecting the hank of hair—they must be gathering for a general advance early in the night. So I set myself at once to organise my defences—lines and parapets of insect-powder—wherewith to discourage if not decimate the advancing horde. But strange to say no attack arrived, no not even a solitary sniper much less the whole division I had expected. And if I may here and now dispose once for all of a subject which, believe me, is the most enthralling that can engage the attention of Man in these climes, I would add that not only here but at no place throughout my sojourn in Bolivia did I ever find myself giving hospitality to these unbidden guests. They cannot live here, that is the astonishing and memorable truth; not from any lack of encouragement by the inhabitants—hens in their hen-house were a cleanlier brood—but because above a certain altitude they can hardly ever stand the rarefied atmosphere.

Pop go their hearts, yea, even his whom we know; and even as he goes out to luncheon one day he is taken, and wafted still hungry to that higher sphere where he may be a Hun or a hornet for all I know, but may not be a Bolivian ——.[1] I think it very marvellous and comforting that this should be so: marvellous to find a corner of the world where Man needs no insect-powder; comforting to think that here if nowhere else we can mock at that which we have previously reckoned among the Immortals.

I spent two nights and a day in this dug-out; and if I did not thereby earn a whole week's leave from the next world I shall be very much disappointed. I slept profoundly; ached gradually a little less; began to grow a little skin where it was urgently needed; and comparing notes with M. R. over the telephone was delighted to find that he ached no less, though far more inured to the mule than I and equipped with a kindlier saddle. You may be surprised to hear of the telephone in such a place as Atocha, and still more surprised when I tell you that he was at least five-and-twenty miles away. But the explanation is quite simple. To this station comes most of the tin and silver ore exported by the Aramayo Company; and all their mines, to the number of five or six, are connected by telephone with each other and with this station. The railway brought here for their purposes will ultimately be extended to join that which reaches out from La Quiaca as yet unequipped with rails. And then, *O fortunati nimium sua si bona norint*, those who travel will do so on seats, sweet seats with

[1] We have been reminded not long ago by the incomparable A. P. H. that the word is not used in the highest circles.

cushioned backs; and in after years when they look back they will no longer ache in certain quarters at the memory of their journey, nor twist in dreams upon the saddle to find some unabraded skin.

On Saturday evening the train duly arrived, and on Sunday I had in the 'Comedor' the first food since leaving La Corona which was plainly intended for the human as opposed to the animal stomach. At two o'clock in the afternoon we started, carrying a big load of Bolivian youths going for their first military training. Service is compulsory here; and they are said to enjoy it, which does not argue a very high standard of happiness in their home life. However, tastes differ. Enjoy it or not, they made noise enough to suggest that they were going to heaven, and grew more and more cheerful at every station. We stopped everywhere as a matter of course; and might almost as well have stopped in between too, so slow was our progress. First we crawled along the side of a dry river-bed. Then we climbed an immense range of sandy hills. And it was there that on looking out I beheld what I have never beheld before—and without luck cannot hope to behold again—namely one of the engine-hands half running half walking beside his engine pouring in oil, and then jogging round very slowly in front of it to do the same on the other side! Such are trains in Bolivia.

Having surmounted the hills we crawled for a long time over an enormous flat desert with the thunder and lightning crackling all round us. Then we crossed another ridge and more plains, and finally about six o'clock we arrived at Uyuni, a

junction on the main line between Antofogasta and Oruro, where I was to change trains.

I do not know if Uyuni is really the beastliest place on earth. It is usually said to be; but no doubt there are competitors. Anyhow it is just a small mining town set out in the middle of a flat, desolate plain, built of earth and mostly roofed with iron. It has railway workshops, drinking shops, sidings for dealing with ore, and very little else, certainly no 'char-r-m.' What gives it so high a rank of beastliness in the eyes of all who know it is that during the winter the prevailing wind comes to it over a gigantic expanse of salt desert, whereon and wherewith the snow makes the best freezing mixture you can possibly imagine; and so the cold is such as can hardly be equalled in the temperate zone. Coal being about £25 to £30 a ton in Bolivia, and wood not too easy to get—for over the greater part of the southern districts not a stick of anything will grow—you will understand that Uyuni is not to be recommended for winter residence. By day, of course, you always have the tropical sun. By night—but it is better not to think of it.

Whatever its drawbacks this place was to me as the land to a swimmer long buffeted by the waves. For now at last I had crossed successfully the trackless ocean between the two railway systems: only a night's journey separated me from Oruro; and my only remaining anxiety was lest the other two Asses, who had left England some time before I did, should after waiting some days and only getting a telegram from Tupiza—if indeed they ever did get it, which was doubtful — have felt that it was impossible to wait longer and gone off as was but

natural to inspect some mining property without me. If so, when I got to Oruro I should in my ignorance of the country and the language be once more in the position of the swimmer aforesaid; though not quite so badly off, as there must of course be other English in the town. However, as it proved, there was no need for anxiety. No sooner had I arranged my things in a sleeping-compartment and strolled along the corridor to the door of the carriage than I beheld coming across the platform from the Antofogasta train a vast figure followed by a slighter one, both making for my door. I looked again, and, dark as it was, knew I could not be mistaken. It was Roger Martin himself, and behind him was Cecil.

"But, but, what—what—in heaven's name are you doing here?" I gasped when greetings were over. "Have you been wrecked or what?"

"Yes, wrecked at Antofogasta by a railway strike, three weeks," was the answer—though not all of it. "And if ever I have a chance of cutting the soul out of the body of the [descriptive] brute who ran that [descriptive] strike——" But here the ticket collector intervened.

Think of it, please. We had come across the world in different ships by different routes starting at different times, and here we were going up from Uyuni in the same sleeping-carriage. Of course from my point of view nothing could be better; I had worried myself to shreds lest I should be too late, and here I was exactly in time. But for them—— The mind quails at the thought of it. Three weeks of what had nearly driven me mad in three days! And what made it worse was that half the English and Americans in Antofogasta had been

rejoicing over the strike, because the cessation of railway traffic meant something like a holiday for them, at any rate much lighter work. Yes, and a certain amount of amusement withal. For the town authority fearing disturbance had intimated to the colonel of the local garrison that they expected him to keep order. Whereto the colonel replied that all his force except thirteen were volunteers, who if there were looting would prefer to loot; while any invitation to the thirteen to stop them would infallibly result in their putting him to death. As it happened there were no disturbances, and he survived. If there are? Well, one hopes they still remember the story of the first big strike which took place in Chile many years ago. The strikers were invited to send a deputation to state their demands. About sixty arrived. The employers heard what they had to say. Then, having the rifles on their side, they replied: "The first part of our answer is that we will not give you the tiniest fraction of what you ask; and the second is, 'Go and line up against that wall.'" There were no more strikes for some time.

Roger, to our surprise—and his—was by no means well; quite sharply affected by the altitude—sickness, headache, ears splitting, tightness across the chest, utter inability to sleep. Cecil and I felt nothing; and this, we were told, is one of the peculiarities of *siroche*. New-comers may be immune: those who have been in the country for years and come back to it after an absence are apt to feel it acutely. Oxygen is carried on some of the trains that go up to Bolivia from the coast, so grave sometimes are the effects; but of course Roger's was quite an every-day case; and he was more disgusted

with himself than anything else, never having had a touch of it before. "I don't believe it is *siroche*," he kept insisting; and we could but reply that in our hearts we did not believe it either; it was probably drink.

XV

'Swapping lies,' I found that the brothers Martin had travelled without event as far as Antofogasta; where if there were only one event, and that only describable by a hiatus, it was enough to last them for the rest of their lives. You may demur to the hiatus and talk, as the priest talked to me once at Tupiza—but not twice—of *Resignacion*; but if you had been gambling, as these two were, with your time and money, and had lost three precious weeks at the very outset of your trip—with corresponding loss of money—you would possibly have something to say, not necessarily beginning with 'R,' as to the character of the men who had stopped you. There did not appear to be any reason for this strike; there seldom is in South America, apart from the work of agitators. But it had come just at the wrong moment for them; the precious weeks had been wasted; and once more had been proved, what I have so often emphasised, that never for a moment on this continent can the traveller be certain of getting to his destination, either within the time appointed or within any time that can be reckoned by human means. 'The morrow is as good as the day.'

We did actually get to our destination about six on the following morning, and at once had proof that it was not the centre of civilisation. Firstly, though we were only a minute or two late in leaving our sleeping-compartment, the carriage was shunted into a distant siding before we had a chance of getting

out of it. Secondly, when we did get out we found ourselves surrounded by a mob of yelling natives all fighting for the chance of carrying our bags.

We had gathered from Roger that among the many good points of Bolivia was the English management of the State railways; and if he had been in a condition to defend himself we should certainly have had something to say to him—even at six A.M.—about the beauties of this management. As it was, we had to content ourselves with a wink and a grin; and I, being according to my domestic circle more obstinate and pig-headed than any offspring of the donkey tribe, was moved to confute the mob by carrying my own bag regardless of its weight.

Roger, however, would have none of this.

"No, no. You can't do that here," he cried. "*Infra dig.* Never done. Really, it's quite impossible."

"But how do I know these imps won't run off with my stuff?"

"They won't; they are perfectly honest. Everyone is in Bolivia."

Again we winked—though certainly we had had no reason to believe otherwise; nor indeed did we ever have any throughout our journeys in this country. But of course we had to accede; and two beings were selected from the mob and entrusted with our bags. A little later our registered luggage was secured; and when two other creatures had been chosen we had an opportunity of seeing what immense loads the native Bolivian can carry; they are all tremendously strong, both men and women. My portmanteau for example, and my camp-bed, each weighing some eighty or ninety

pounds, had been deemed together a fitting load for one mule. But to the small, filthy, hairy individual who had secured them they seemed apparently to be nothing unusual for one man. He lashed them together carefully with a rope, got himself somehow underneath them, and with his head almost touching his toes walked away with them slowly but steadily towards our hotel, holding them on his back by the rope over one shoulder as though they were quite an ordinary burden. I suppose they were from his point of view; but I know a good many people whom I should like to see getting off the mark with that load on their backs—and myself as driver. A hundred and seventy pounds, where seventy are usually regarded as ample for one man!

We walked to our hotel, and persuaded the owner with great difficulty to let us have a room each—though why he should have done so I do not know, most people being content to sleep two or three in a room and thereby double or treble his receipts. We also proceeded to order hot baths. I do not know if anyone has ever had a hot bath before in Bolivia; if so he must be one who, like ourselves, had not counted the cost. Six shillings a head was what we had subsequently to pay; and if we had known that at the time we should have been in those baths still, some eighteen months later. The reason is the colossal price and scarcity of fuel, which I have already indicated. And the only solution, except for millionaires, is to wash in your basin and still further disregard the already disregarded carpet.

Not only because it owned a bath, but for other reasons, our hotel was a palace beside those I had hitherto encountered. It had two storeys built round a central courtyard, which had been roofed

with glass and turned into a dining-hall. It had a large drinking-room; bedrooms of quite sufficient size for one—though they were always equipped with two beds; and not only this, but it even had creatures who waited on you, and quite efficiently too. You called "Mozo" in any part of the house, and a dusky and grinning but quite intelligent 'boy' appeared, who, if you could not tell him what you wanted, seemed usually able to guess.

Now for a glance at Oruro. It cannot be described as an attractive town. Indeed one does not like to think of that hard case in which a man would find it pleasing either to eye or nose. But in one respect at any rate it has some claim to distinction—namely that it is a mining town existing originally for that purpose and no other, which yet has managed to stay where it is for more than three hundred years. As a rule of course towns of this type spring up like mushrooms and die as quickly, bringing no permanent benefit to the country in which they grow. Oruro, however, dates back as far as 1600, when the Spaniards realised the wealth of tin and silver ore in the hills about it and made it one of their principal settlements. Some eighty years later it was reputed to have a population of 37,000 people in addition to 75,000 Indians, who apparently were not regarded—they certainly were not treated—as human beings. But whether this statement can be accepted or not is more than doubtful. If true it means that Spain migrated to South America in the seventeenth century on an immensely bigger scale in proportion than England did to South Africa during the gold boom; and this, when one considers the relative facilities—steamer and train for us, for them an endless journey

STREET SCENES, ORURO

via the Horn and then weeks or months by mule over the Andes—is not easy so believe. There is too the obvious difficulty if not impossibility of feeding and watering such vast numbers in the midst of an utterly unproductive country; and there is also the fact that to-day the general aspect of the town, with its population of about 25,000, in no way suggests that it could ever have been four or five times as large. *Credat Judaeus.*

Beneath these hills, which are lined and scarred and tunnelled in every direction by the mining of generations of men, the modern town lies on an eastward slope facing a great breadth of desert, all twelve thousand feet above sea-level. Beyond this desert are other hills, all barren: there is scarcely any vegetation in this part of Bolivia. The streets are for the most part laid out at right angles, and perfectly straight. The houses are mainly built of earth though some are of stone; and all alike are covered with stucco painted white, yellow, pink, grey, blue, etc. Many of them are old, built in the time of the Spanish occupation—which lasted from 1535 to 1825—and equipped with courtyards and barred windows just as in Spain of to-day. It looks as if there must be a great waste of space as a result of this; and presumably space is of high value in the midst of so flourishing a town. Method, however, is in the madness; for a house of this type, it seems, is often the home not only of a whole family but of a whole clan. Father and mother perhaps occupy one set of rooms; their parents and grandparents and any odd uncles or aunts another; the children as they marry are given separate quarters; their children follow; and so it goes on till the mind

quails at the arithmetic needed—and the overcrowding produced. Luckily there are no regulations about 'minimum cubic space' in Bolivia; if there were the bulk of the people of all classes would live in the street.

The centre of the town is as usual the Plaza—a big square paved with cobble-stones, and relieved by little beds of shrubs and small trees kept alive by constant watering. There is a bandstand and, alas, a band. There are hotels, kinema-halls, restaurants, a huge and hideous bank, and a big block of Government offices. This Plaza is of course the centre of the city's life. Here on *fiesta* days you will see the entire population showing themselves off. Here take place the elections, of which I shall have something to tell you later. Here the male inhabitants native and foreign assemble in various taverns before lunch and dinner for talk and cocktails. And here anyone, male or female, who has nothing else to do comes to stroll about or sit in the sun and talk, flirt, idle, or, in the evening—so strange is the world we live in—listen to the band. There are unfortunately no indigenous amusements. The score or two of English people who are here for business or railway management have made one or two tennis-courts; and there is a golf-links just distinguishable from the desert: apart from these nothing but the kinema and the cocktail. This part of Bolivia is as destitute of animal as of plant life; and there is practically speaking no sport; so after his work a man has little or nothing to do except to talk and drink, and it is a marvel that he does not do more of the latter than he does. No part of South America can be described so far as exactly 'dry':

and one cannot say that Bolivia is giving a very definite lead in that direction.

When you have seen the Plaza you have seen all. There is just one other small square and a church or two; for the rest nothing but the streets, straight, narrow, filthy and malodorous, and all paved with cobble-stones which have assumed the configuration of the country and gone into majestic hills and valleys. In the central streets there are good shops selling English and American goods with a catholicity which I have not seen elsewhere. At your grocer's, for example, you find such things as saws, china, air-guns, perambulators and tobacco; at a saddler's there will be tweed, gramophones, petticoats and note-paper; at a chemist's, cameras and English chocolates; at the confectioner's, champagne—so-called; I never met anyone who had ventured on it—and at almost every shop beer and calico. And when you get away from the central streets and look in at the doors of the 'native' shops—which is enough for most noses—you will find them selling all these things promiscuously. Beer is their stand-by; but in addition they can usually supply you with axes, tomatoes, false teeth, string, flannel, furniture, meat, soda-water, mining tools, bread or women's hats, according to your need. These outlying streets descend rapidly in quality of houses till they end abruptly in the desert or the hills; and there is only one street in all Oruro, the Avenida, which has any sort of breadth or dignity. That runs for about a mile north and south; and at the northern end of it there is even an attempt at a residential suburb, the houses being larger than most of those in the town; though perhaps more hideous, and that is saying a

great deal. Thereafter, a little way out, come the barracks; and after that the desert. There are big railway workshops too at the northern end, and at the southern a cemetery that revolts the eye even more than anything else in Oruro. The ground being too rocky to receive the bodies, they are placed in niches in great walls of earth built up ten or twelve feet above the ground. There are curious little chapels here and there, all built of mud; and there is a large central building resembling nothing so much as the sort of monstrosity you see on the end of a pier at such places as Brighton or Blackpool, all glass and bright blue paint and gaudiness; so that you think, "Here is the White City or Earl's Court of Oruro," and are quite surprised when you are told what it really is.

The inhabitants retire to this cemetery far more frequently and at an earlier age than we should approve of in England—the death-rate must be very high—but not more frequently, it must be owned, than they deserve to. For sanitation is not the strong point of Oruro; nor in view of the native's ideas on that subject would any attempt at improving it be of the faintest use; they just do as seems good to them. There is as a result a great deal of typhoid always present and frequently epidemic. Pneumonia carries off immense numbers of natives; the cold (in winter), the rarefied atmosphere and the extra work placed on the heart by the altitude making it a very dangerous enemy. Enteric and dysentery also take their toll. And though Europeans with their stronger constitutions and cleanlier habits stand the conditions better than natives, they too have far more illness and death among them than they would at home. For

my part, I am not ashamed to confess that I always drenched my handkerchief in scent before I went out; and so by breaking the edge of the attack believe that I saved myself from unthinkable penalties of disease.

XVI

THE aim of the Three Asses being to inspect and acquire options on ore-bearing properties their first business was to make themselves known and seek out those who might be of use to them. This they did in two ways: partly through the good offices of the British Consul at Oruro, who must surely be the best Consul in the world; and partly through friends and acquaintances of Roger's whom he had known during his earlier residence here. I have no doubt that you will say that here at any rate we had an easy and agreeable task leading to various new friendships and pleasant meetings, and involving little or nothing of the '*ardua*' in that fine motto, '*Per ardua ad astra.*' But if you think this I would just ask you one question. "Have you or have you not known what it is to live, unwont and unwilling, in a state of more or less complete inebriation for nearly two weeks?" If not, I cannot allow that your opinion is of any value. You do not *know*.

Doubtless this is an exaggeration, and we had our intervals of sobriety; but looking back upon the period I cannot but feel that there is truth in the description. No man, so far as I can gather, ever talks to another in South America without offering him a drink. No man refuses. No bargain can be struck, no business even broached without broaching of another kind. It is hard to refuse, especially with Latin-Americans, who are almost sure to think you unfriendly or even insulting; harder still of course not to offer when an offer is due. Either

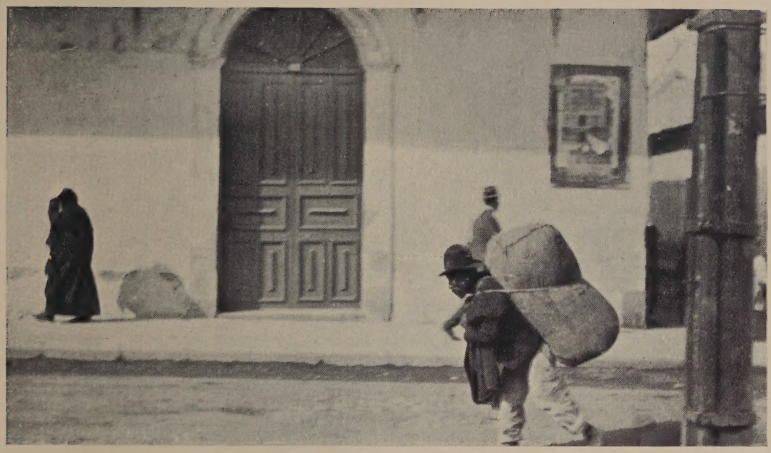
way you almost have to drink. And when half-a-dozen people happen to meet at a bar or kinema the amount consumed is more or less in ratio to the number of people present. '*Per ardua.*' I should think it was!

A drink in Bolivia, and for that matter anywhere in South America, nearly always means a cocktail. Bolivian beer there is: *blanca* (lager beer) and *negra* (stout), both excellent; also Bolivian wine very far from excellent; in fact what you buy is probably the sourest, sharpest, thinnest liquid ever conjured from the grape; though what you may be given by a wine-grower is usually excellent showing what he could do for everyone if he took a little trouble. Chilean wines you can always buy, and usually enjoy, but owing to the enormous import duties you will not enjoy paying for them. Port, so-called, is obtainable at all the bars and restaurants; but here as everywhere in South America it is a terrible concoction, apparently made of treacle and raspberry vinegar with a dash of brandy thrown in. And so one is practically confined to spirits or cocktails, both of which in Oruro are apt to be terrible stuff; for everything here is either made, watered, adulterated or counterfeited in Chile. The bottle of Scotch whisky for example, for which you give a gigantic price, will have been half-emptied there and filled up with raw spirit and water. The ravishing flask of Benedictine glowing and globular which you covet in the shop window, and which has all the finery and apparel of the real thing, will contain a substitute certainly quite passable brewed in the same land of tolerance and liberty. A mystery which I never was able to solve is that in La Paz you can buy good brands of

Scotch whisky whose corks have never been broached; but in Oruro you are lucky ever to get a drop of liquor that has not been tampered with. Drink it you must, for there is nothing else. But it is not unmingled joy. Alas that a country like South America which has the grape, the sun, the Latin temperament and everything that should make it a wine-drinking country should descend to this lower plane of taste, and absorb its spirits and cocktails like Scotland or Canada or any other country that has never had a chance.

To drink in Oruro is to talk. And to talk is to talk mines. There is no other topic. You take your seat opposite a man and wonder which mine he will talk about; that is all the variety you must expect. Everyone is here to make money, directly or indirectly, out of the mines.

There are a few well-known firms such as Duncan & Fox, Graham Rowe, Balfour Williamson, etc., who for the most part keep to the narrow path of trade, buying and exporting ore, importing everything from a tractor to a tooth-pick, and leaving the mines to those who care to speculate. But even they are dependent on these mines for their prosperity; for the more money dug out of the earth the more naturally there is to be spent on their goods. And as for the Bolivian part of the community, the lawyers, doctors, tradesmen, 'travellers,' clerks, officials and gentlemen of independent means, you will hardly find one among them who has not an interest of some kind in some mining property. Everyone gambles. Everyone is 'in it.' Everyone hopes some day to bring off a big *coup*. And everyone talks, as is only to be expected, of other people's mining business. What



A Porter in Oruro

A Bolivian Market

this man spent and that man gained; how So-and-so turned down a reef and A. N. Other made it an Eldorado; what option A desired and B allowed; what figure was given here and what resulted there —that is the talk throughout Oruro. The atmosphere is—or was when we were there—one of tremendous excitement, tremendous schemes and deals, tremendous speculations, successes and failures. There is always a boom coming or a slump feared. And even if you are not interested in these personally you cannot escape the feeling of excitement and speculation in the air. (Not much of that left in 1922 I am told; the only speculation is as to who will go 'broke' next.)

For two reasons the moment of our visit to Bolivia was one of rather more excitement than usual. Firstly the price of tin, which had in old days been something like £90 to £120 a ton, had risen to the fabulous figure of nearly £400, and was expected to go higher — it is about £160 at the moment of writing. Secondly, the huge American firm of Guggenheim had recently been launching some tremendous schemes for the purchase and development of Bolivian properties. It seems that until recently England had to a great extent controlled the principal sources of tin in the world, mainly those in the Malay Peninsula; and the American firms had had to buy their raw material through England, more or less at England's price. With gigantic smelting works to keep going near New York the Guggenheims did not relish this; and set themselves to acquire their own sources of supply, their method being roughly to purchase ranges of mountains in Bolivia and move them to New York. The result is—or was at the time of our

visit—that in one or two districts they were buying up almost every claim, good, bad or indifferent within certain areas, so as to gain full control of those areas. And hence there had arisen a sort of feeling that they would buy anything or everything at unprecedented prices; and everyone was asking unheard-of figures for properties which a few years before they had despaired of selling at any price. Needless to say they did not always get them; for there are few firms better able to protect themselves than Messrs Guggenheim. But the presence of the latter and their gigantic schemes had undoubtedly stimulated mining enterprises; and the Chileans, who have been responsible for most of the mining development of Bolivia, were also launching out here even more vigorously than before. In Chile, it is said, you do not need a mine at all to start a gamble on the Stock Exchange, only a 'skeleton' company and a name that sounds like a mine or a nitrate-field. However that may be it is certainly a country with a natural bent towards mining; it has many enormously rich mines of its own; and its money and enterprise are behind most of those in Bolivia.

Naturally we soon had a swarm of property-owners about our ears, many of them with obviously inflated accounts of their property, and still more inflated ideas of its value; and there we sat day after day in various temples of Alcohol and listened politely to their fiction, while ladling deleterious drinks into their bodies. Some were English, some American, some Spanish, some Italian, some plain Bolivian; and all, you will instantly conclude, were something else too. But it would not be fair to say that. Many of them

seemed to be genuine fellows, who told us quite truthfully, so far as we could gather, what their properties amounted to; and being very anxious to sell them did not ask an unwieldy price. These, if their accounts seemed sufficiently promising, we would invite into one of our bedrooms—you must know that in Bolivia all business is conducted in bedrooms, for the excellent reason that in a hotel there is nowhere else to conduct it—and there in conference we would search the man like a board of examiners with hard questions; and endeavour to decide if his property were worth a visit or not.

Take the Widow's Cruse, for example.

The Widow was a Brazilian lady who had somehow become possessed of an excellent little tin mine. As might be expected of anyone in the world but a native Bolivian her chief ambition in life was to get out of the country at the first possible moment and at almost any price. Twenty thousand pounds, however, was the minimum price recommended by her adviser, a thoroughly honest mining engineer hailing from New Zealand, whom we will call Mr F.; and till she got that she could not go.

Mr F. came to explain how matters stood; and there in Roger's bedroom we talked, the three of us sitting quite normally on beds, and Roger as usual tilting on the back of an arm-chair which seemed likely to collapse at any moment beneath his weight.

"Well, what shall it be, Mr F.?" began Roger, host on this occasion. Most conversations begin this way in Bolivia.

"Martini, please."

"Stout."

"Whisky Saurre."

"Mozo!"

Mozo appeared and received orders.

"Now, what about this old crack in the earth of yours? When did you say you put the tin in?"

"Just before the war," said Mr F. solemnly, knowing his man. "Wouldn't pay since. Tin's too high."

"H'm—and how much?"

"Oh, a good few tons. I made four seams—roughly, 2 ft.; 3 ft. 6 in.; 1 ft. 6 in., and 2 ft. 4 in."

"Expensive, then?"

"Yes, but they look nice. You'll find a tidy lot of stuff in there."

"But Mr F.," put in Cecil, who cannot stand waiting a second for anything; "do you mean really that there are four seams being worked and they are all really good stuff?"

"First-rate—eight to twelve per cent. pure tin."

"By Jove!"

I saw Roger scowl. We were plainly showing much too much interest, and I intervened.

"What is the history of it all? Who is working it?"

"Pedro Langlé now, a Bolivian johnny. It is like this. For years and years Mrs —— has been swindled right and left by her managers. Now at last she has got an ace, a real good 'un; and he is turning out about ten or twelve thousand quintals a month—grand stuff, too, I can tell you—and getting thirty dollars a quintal for the expenses."

"Not much left for the Widow then," growled Roger.

"But indeed there is."

"Why, she is getting between four and five thousand a year out of it," cried Cecil, who has the

powers of a freak in reckoning figures—"four or five thousand a year; and she is asking?"

"Only twenty thousand."

"Ah, but how long is it going to last?"

"Can't tell you."

"Fortnight?" asked Roger.

"Oh, scarcely so long as that," said Mr F.

"No, but really? How much ore in sight?"

"Ah, that is rather difficult to say."

Down to 'brass tacks' now, thought I; and we all held our peace till Cecil desired to know what machinery the mine possessed and how many men were employed.

"About thirty-five men," was the answer. "No machinery."

"But—but I don't understand," gasped Cecil. "I thought you said it was a going concern—a mine."

"So it is."

"But without machinery—I don't see—— How on earth do you run it?"

"That is one of the things you have got to learn, my son," said Roger, with the smile of the wise. "Bolivians don't go much on machinery; they haven't the capital, that is the fact of the matter. When a Bolivian finds a good thing he just prods his nose into the best part of it and digs away with tools made by Tubal Cain till he has got back his original outlay and perhaps doubled it and made, say two or three thousand pounds. Then he'll strut about for a bit telling everybody, 'I've got a mine worth three thousand pounds.' Then perhaps he will go back and have another dig and take out another thousand or so, and another; but he never dreams of getting any machinery or testing

or developing the rest of his property—he just pegs away at the best part and leaves the rest to look after itself. I'll wager that has happened in this case."

"Oh well, I don't know about that," said Mr F. tentatively.

"Oh yes, you do, you old Ananias; you know it as well as I do. What does the property amount to anyway?"

"It is a thousand metres by two hundred."

"And untouched bar this one little dig at one end."

"Well——"

"Of course it is. I knew that well enough. Anything in it?"

"We don't know. Ought to be, judging by the land all round it."

"Ah, I've heard of that land before," sighed Roger.

"Don't take any notice of him, Mr F.," said Cecil. "If he has once proved himself right, which isn't once a year, he is not fit to speak to for a week. Tell me, how deep have you gone on this reef?"

"Nothing to speak of. Say a hundred and eighty feet.

"Then if you have got no machinery, how do you get the ore up?"

"Hand windlass."

Cecil seemed to me to shudder, but preserved his courtesy.

"I suppose that cannot go on much longer," he suggested quietly.

"Very little longer."

"No wonder she wants to sell them."

"Yes, but mind you it is a grand little show for anyone who has the money to spend. Very rich stuff; near rail; cheap to run. Should be worth at least five thousand a year to a man who has proper plant, and always the chance of finding something A1 on the rest of the property."

"Five thousand. That includes your fees?"

"I don't charge the lady anything at present; just go and have a squint when I am passing."

Cecil gasped again.

"Well, this is a rum country if ever there was one."

"You'll find rummier things than that here, I can tell you."

Altogether we liked the account of the Widow's Cruse and mentally decided that it was worth a visit, though we did not encourage Mr F. by telling him so. That was that.

XVII

THAT was that: and there were innumerable interviews like it; many conducted by Roger in the Spanish tongue, at which Cecil and I were not only useless but, as he gently but firmly informed us, worse than useless because he had constantly to be interpreting to us and telling us what was going on. Solemn swarthy gentlemen would arrive at our hotel with bundles of papers and plans under their arms. They would be shown up to Roger's bedroom and there, after much bowing and scraping on both sides, would slowly reveal to us that they had ore-bearing property of immense importance and value to dispose of. As soon as possible Cecil and I would bow ourselves out of the room, Roger explaining that we had important business elsewhere; and while we attended to our business he attended to his, which consisted in delving out of the Bolivian mind such truth as it was willing to impart—*and* a little more.

This was an accomplishment which he had given us to understand demanded no little respect on our part; for few people were so well qualified as he to understand and earn the confidence of the Bolivian race, and fewer still so good at meeting and counteracting their wiles. Needless to say we ragged him unmercifully on this point, but in secret we were bound to confess that he showed some intelligence. Take the case, for example, which we called 'Legend One-thousand-and-One.'

In the old days Roger and a partner agreed with a

Bolivian to buy a certain area of land containing alluvial gold for a thousand pounds. A month later when they returned to pay and to begin work on it they were calmly informed that the price was fifteen hundred. That would have been the end of the matter for many people, or else led to an interminable wrangle. But knowing the Bolivian mind these two had taken the precaution to bring the money in gold; and when the Bolivian played his new card they brought in their saddle-bags and emptied a thousand English sovereigns on the bed—the celestial things were plentiful enough in those days. At sight of them the Bolivian relapsed into the condition of the Queen of Sheba, and took them without a murmur; with the result that Roger and his partner made a net profit of two thousand on the transaction. You may doubt in these lean days if anyone in the world Bolivian or otherwise could resist the sight of a thousand bright new sovereigns rolling and chinking about on his bed—I am sure I couldn't—but those were not lean days, at any rate so far as the coinage was concerned; and the Bolivian if a knave was also a considerable part of a fool.

These preliminary talks were nearly always of interminable length. In the first place all business has to be conducted in a slow and stately manner in South America—failure to realise which is one reason why the Yankees are so intensely disliked throughout the Southern continent. In the second place the amount of detail needed to decide whether a property merited a visit or not was considerable: not only the extent of the land had to be considered, but the distance from a railway, the nature of the ore—if at all complex its value was greatly lessened

—the width of the seams, the possibilities of timber and water supply, the amount of labour available, the validity of the title, and the possible difficulties of transport and treatment. All these things Roger had to ferret out of our Bolivian friends by long and devious questioning; and though he did it well and we had to admit that he had great qualities as a ferret we chid him unmercifully as to the amount of time he spent on it, and longed to have some arrangement by which we could pull him out with a piece of string, as a keeper does his envoy after it has been too long in a rabbit-hole.

For our part when off duty like this we could but spend our time in exploring the city and environs of Oruro, and making the most of such amenities as it afforded. Mercifully there was a good book-shop and we could buy no end of English novels, mostly reprints, but quite a few of the most recent date, such as the latest productions of Wells, Galsworthy, McKenna or Compton Mackenzie. And still more mercifully there was a club, largely Bolivian but partially English, whereon like manna from heaven there descended sometimes, though it was impossible to reckon when, English and Argentine papers such as *The Graphic*, *The Bystander*, *La Nacion* (of B.A.) and one or two English journals published in Chile. The sight of an English paper in a country like Bolivia is something so ravishing that you can but fly to Omar Khayyám and wonder what the owners 'find to buy,' etc. In England, as we know, one's speculation is of just the opposite kind; but if it should ever occur to a newspaper proprietor to question his utility in the scheme of things—you need not faint at the hypothesis, it is but for the sake of argument—he might do worse

THE PLAZA, ORURO

THE SMALLER 'PLAZA'

than take a journey to Bolivia, where he will find that the distance from home, as well as the fact of Spanish being the language of the country, gives his most fatuous productions a value he could hardly give them himself.

This club, of which we were most hospitably made honorary members, presented so pointed a contrast to an English club that I really must tell you about it. The major part of it was nothing more nor less than a vast ballroom, a huge expanse of carpet surrounded by gilt chairs and settees and evidently used only on state occasions. We were present on one of these occasions, as it happened, on New Year's Day. About four o'clock the whole rank and fashion of Oruro assembled—the men in black tail-coats and the women in their best afternoon dresses—and very fine dresses they were too—and after drinking to each other in Moët and Chandon we all sat or stood round the room while the chief dignitaries of the place and their wives went through a solemn quadrille. Then followed the usual dances of the day, tango, jazz and two-step, all excellently danced; and in the evening a dinner at which there were quite as many ladies present as men. All seemed natural and normal enough out there; but I do ask you to think of it in England—a jazz-band and ladies footing it till dawn in the Conservative, the 'Senior,' the Reform, or that club which 'always feels as though there were a dead duke upstairs.'

Apart from this scene of revelry there was another huge room with a bar at one end, a number of small billiard-tables, small tables galore for your drinks, no books or papers, but much vociferous talk. In this room too—it sounds almost like

blasphemy to mention it—there was a piano—yes, and it was a player-piano too—on which at any moment of the day you might hear some member grinding out the latest dance-music. Away from the big capitals there is practically no other music in South America. And leading off this room was a skittle-alley — O shade of St James's — wherein nightly members gathered together and made an earth-shaking clatter with the bowls and skittles, and I must add with their voices too: you have to hear a Latin race excited to know what noise can be. One small room with a single table sufficed to provide reading matter. There were four or five Bolivian dailies, in which Europe might any day discover how unimportant she is. There were the English papers I have mentioned; a few Spanish, French, Portuguese and American weeklies; and some cupboards full of English and Spanish books. There was a small dining-room where you could have either lunch or dinner if you wanted to. But no one apparently ever did want to; at any rate I seldom saw it used. And but for offices and outbuildings, all on the same floor—which indeed was the only one—that was all; there was no further accommodation. A small and curious club you will think it. But it filled its place, and it was very much what people wanted in Oruro. The English do not mix much with the Bolivians; and yet they cannot apparently get on without each other, the English being too few to run a club of their own, and the Bolivians not seeming to understand the idea of a club at all—it would simply be a bar and little else. Whatever its idiosyncrasies, to strangers like ourselves it was of indescribable value; and never shall we forget the joy of lighting upon a new

Bystander or *Tatler*, or spelling out from the Argentine *La Nacion*—only a fortnight old—some of the news of Europe which otherwise had entirely escaped us.

Needless to say, the English and Americans in Oruro, being English and American, overwhelmed us with hospitality; and our evenings were as full as they might be in England. Apart from this, however, and apart from reading there was little to do but walk. And walking in Oruro meant in the first place deciding which set of smells you could bring yourself to face, and then facing them with set teeth and a scented handkerchief. There were roughly three directions in which you could walk: north through the Avenida into the desert; south along the railway into the desert; and west up the barren hills behind the town. The eastern route—also into the desert—had to be ruled out at once as impassable; for that led through the lowest part of the town, and any drains there might be either on the surface or below it seemed to finish their career here, with a result that need not and anyhow cannot be described. Any day you might have seen Cecil and me starting off with an heroic sense of duty and the need for exercise, Cecil with two or three packets of Bolivian cigarettes in his pocket—the only ones he could get—and me with the bottle of scent in my hand.

"Better have some to-day," I would urge. "Baccy's no good."

"No, thanks," he would answer, a little 'sniffy.' "I will back a Bolivian cigarette to floor any Bolivian smell."

"H'm, I don't know which is worst. You didn't find it so yesterday, that is all I can say."

More than once he had yielded somewhat shamefacedly to the scent-bottle.

"That is because nothing but a gas-mask could be of any use then. It may be better to-day. Anyhow even you with your boudoirful of bottles could hardly breathe."

"I breathed a deal better than you did going uphill, although I am twelve years older."

"Not you."

"I did; simply because I don't smoke and you do. You are like a refuse-destructor, always alight. And when you die they will find your inside coated with oil of nicotine, like the inside of an exhaust-pipe."

"You won't be there to see, anyhow."

"Well then death will have one compensation at any rate. Now which way do you want to go? Avenida?"

"No, I'm fed."

"Railway?"

"O that belt of smells just outside the station!"

"Up the hill at the back then?"

"Worse still. That was where we had to run, wasn't it?"

"Yes I believe it was, and then couldn't get away from them. What about going farther along the hill where the rail-track runs up to that mine?"

"Oh, well——"

Say he agreed and we took that route. The first part of the way lay through streets where it was not necessary to hold the nose quite continuously. Cecil would pretend to ignore such smells as there were, puffing hard at his cigarette and talking all the time about the filth of the native Bolivian and the superiority of the Kafir. He was right no

doubt: the latter does wash himself whenever he can, and the lower-class South American never. But there were moments when I felt that his comments and the stentorian voice in which he made them must penetrate even the understanding of the Spanish-speaking folk about us; and that some day they would come surging about us with their knives, and reduce us to the mince-meat we doubtless deserved to be. As it was the comments—and the attendant anxiety—would last probably till we came to a hill and he ran short of breath, and words; or else till we were assailed—as we frequently were—by some devastating smell, and had to clap handkerchiefs to noses and run to get into a more tolerable atmosphere. It was here as a rule that I was able to score; for he who has scent can at any rate breathe that, while he who has none hardly dares to breathe at all. And it was here sometimes as we panted uphill, struggling for breath because of the altitude, but afraid to stop because of the smells; it was here, I say, that Pride would sometimes falter, and side-slip and come to earth with a crash; and as I opened the scent-bottle to replenish my own handkerchief another would be held out before me, and there would be a murmur of "Just a drop, will you?"

And without comment the drop would be given.

XVIII

To know what scorn is, watch the face of a well-trained mining engineer like Cecil when he looks upon the plant and arrangements of a Bolivian mine. There is never much difficulty about looking at them. At those close to Oruro at any rate we wandered about just as we pleased, no one seeming to care whether we were there or not, no one indeed, appearing to be in charge ; and we were able at our leisure to inspect the venerable contrivances which there did duty for ' plant.' We beheld an ancient steam-engine for example, whose function it was with infinite slowness to haul up ore from the depths of the mine, and whose fuel was that which a llama had done with. We beheld rows of women sitting on the ground and sorting by hand the ore brought to them from the mine. We beheld apparatus that in Europe would long ago have been treasured by a museum. On every side we beheld litter and waste. And never shall I forget the look of horror I beheld one day on Cecil's face when, standing together by the mouth of a shaft, we saw the shutters open and out of the depths appear a load of ore conveyed in—what do you think ? Why, the hide of a cow with all the hair on it !

Such a shock might well have proved fatal to a man like Cecil, who had spent more than twelve years on the Rand—we came away wondering if the men were hauled up in the same receptacle too. However, he survived it and even worse things before he left the country. After all one can hardly

expect Bolivia to be the herald of the dawn in mining any more than she is in other matters—*e.g.* sanitation. For though mining has no doubt been carried on here for centuries before we have any history—that is, for centuries before the Incas ruled; and though it is likely that throughout that time, as now, almost every man in the country has been a 'miner' by instinct and heredity, working in or interested in some vein of ore, yet the remoteness of the territory and its distance from the world have kept its people very far behind that of other countries, even those of South America. Look at its position: on the west side cut off from all access to the sea by the almost impassable wall of the Andes; on the east blocked by the measureless swamp and jungle of Brazil. Men would need a big temptation to bring them through such obstacles as these. And though they had one, it is true; and though the Spaniards came, and stayed nearly three centuries there was never any prospect of their founding a permanent community based, as every healthy community must be in the end, on agricultural prosperity. They only took away what gold and silver they could find, and left a tradition of frightful cruelty and oppression. There was indeed nothing else to come for in those days; a great part of the country being desert, and all of it so difficult of access. So there could never be any stream of immigration; and till the railways came, about twenty years ago, Bolivia had no chance of becoming other than what she always no doubt had been, slothful, inefficient, uneducated and incredibly backward. Now, with railways, she has a chance. For though as has been said, about one-third of her territory is pure desert, offering neither timber, fuel,

vegetation, nor any hope to farmer, stockman or gardener, yet over the remainder—a tract about the size of Spain and Germany put together—the soil is as fertile as any in the world; there are vast tracts of land suitable for cattle raising; and the climate—climates rather, for there are about a dozen, corresponding to different altitudes—is, or are, suitable for growing any crop you like to name, from fur-bearing animals to rubber or cotton.[1]

In centuries to come this territory should be a mass of thriving ranches, wheat-fields, rubber, rice, tobacco, cotton, coffee and sugar plantations; and then Bolivia may become something more than what she is to-day—namely, a country to which men come simply to fill their coffers and go away again. But will she? Who knows? We must remember where we are—in the continent of '*mañana.*'

As a result of this remoteness the Bolivians are a very primitive race, very poor, very humble and very unenlightened; a condition of things which is certainly a gain to those who come here for purposes of mining development, and even from the people's own point of view has great advantages. For think what it means in these days to have a labouring class which is as a rule submissive, hard-working, content with its lot, and unperverted by agitators and artificial 'movements.' Where will you find

[1] It is worth while quoting on this point the description given by a writer for the League of Nations: "One may stand in a tropical valley of this country of great contrasts, under a palm with monkeys, parrots and brilliant-plumed birds chattering and screaming about, where all the products of the equatorial region grow rampant, and look from the torrid zone up past the temperate zone above the clouds past the pine and habitat of the lichen, past the region of snow-moving glaciers to the abode of perpetual snow, where glaciers are born and where no living thing save man has ever been. Mount Sorata, for example, has an altitude of 21,703 feet."

its like to-day? Strikes there have been no doubt during the last few years; but never of the frivolous, petty, unjustified kind which we have come to regard as the only kind in England now: they have only arisen when wages were well below the cost of living; and there has never been any of the organised, universal 'strike-movement' going right through the country which is so common with us. Were it to be attempted it could not succeed, with the mining settlements so far from each other and so isolated; and for a few years to come one may safely say that Bolivia will be one of the best countries in the world so far as the Labour situation is concerned. But we are already beginning to hear of the agitator there, and it is not for ever that it will remain so quiet. At present it is a wonderful contrast to its neighbours, Peru, Chile and the Argentine; which have troubles quite as serious as our own, and in most cases far more violent and revolutionary.

Here then is one advantage of 'non-civilisation'—yes, even from the point of view of the people themselves; they are probably far more contented and better off in their primitive state than they would be in any other. A second, which Chadband himself wonld not profess to be an advantage to the indigenous people, is that no Bolivian who finds or acquires a mineral deposit ever has the least idea how to make a big thing out of it. He cannot 'part,' that is the truth of the matter; cannot bear, if he has any money, to spend it that money may come. Only two Bolivians, so far as I could hear, have ever achieved any big success in this respect; and even they have had very limited ideas about necessary outlay. No, the Bolivian sets to work

much in the way that has been described, goes for the 'fat' on his property and never develops the 'lean'; so that sooner or later he gets beaten by a difficulty of some sort and has to give the whole thing up, or else sell it or a share to someone better equipped with brains and money. That is where the Chilean, American or Englishman has his chance; and so far as the two former are concerned they are not slow to take it. But the Englishman, alas, lags far behind the other two. He has never been able to believe in Bolivia; never can think of it except as a comic-opera country where revolutions take place every day; and never can be persuaded that his money is quite as safe there as in most countries. To Chile therefore and the United States goes most of the wealth of these mines; as is quite right; for they, especially the former, have done most to develop them. The Bolivians put heavy taxes on the exported ore, and are doubtless richer as a nation for having so much foreign money spent in their midst. But that is about all they get out of their mines, and all they deserve to. Needless to say, they do not love the foreigner any better for having done what they could not, and brought them so much prosperity.

Touching the subject of strikes, the impression which seems to prevail in England that Bolivia, like some other South American republics, lives in a ferment of rebellion and anarchy is quite incorrect. There have been revolutions it is true both in 1920 and 1921; and in the latter case there was pretty serious fighting in the streets of La Paz. But before the former of these you have to go back to 1904 to find another; and in point of fact the word 'revolution' is a very big word to describe very

small happenings. 'Change of government' is as a rule a more suitable description; and there is seldom any bloodshed to speak of. If there is it is as a rule confined to La Paz, and has not the least effect on the prosperity of the mines. The huge extent of the country, the sparsity of population, and the vast distances between settlement and settlement, quite apart from the question of food-supply in so barren a country, make combined action impossible; and the only result, paradoxical as it may sound, of the usual 'revolution' is an access of Labour to the mines; everyone flocking there to demand work, because so and so alone may they be sure of getting their victuals. When you read then as you may sometimes, that there has been another 'revolution' in Bolivia, do not suppose that it means slaughter, destruction of property and wholesale rebellion, as it might in some highly organised country like England or France of to-day. On the contrary it just means a little street fighting between small political factions in one town, while the rest of the nation goes about its business, mining, just as usual.

This is not to say that politics are conducted there with the same urbanity as in our House of Lords. Of the contrary indeed there was proof at Oruro just before we arrived. The 'Ins'—it was some sort of local or municipal election—were a little afraid of being turned out; and disliking the prospect extremely set armed men at each entrance to the Plaza, where the polling was to take place, with instructions to dissuade any suspected of 'Out' views from entering to record their votes. This was to be done with the bayonet if necessary; but if even that failed they were to use really strong arguments—England you see has no monopoly of

'peaceful picketing.' The bayonet did not fail as a rule; and the majority of the voters proved fairly easy to convince. But a few were so obstinate as to maintain that they too had a right to record their views; and of these three had to be shot at sight and several others wounded; which just shows how pig-headed some people can be. Even in Bolivia, however, this seemed to be regarded as rather an unconventional proceeding; and instead of dismissing it—as one would have expected in South America—as though it were about equal in importance to the killing of a goose for Christmas, the papers talked of little else for several days, and represented the community as being bowed to earth by the gravity of the occasion.

We did not observe much of this gravity ourselves at any period of our stay in Oruro. And certainly there was none on New Year's Day. This is one of the great *fiesta* days of the year, far more important than Christmas; and from morning till night the entire population of all classes seemed to collect in the Plaza and show themselves off to each other in their choicest clothes. Those who had motors of their own appeared in them; those who had not hired them; and you might see whole families—of several generations—wedged into shining limousines, driving slowly round and round this one square, apparently for the single purpose of being looked at. A few officers appeared on horses and also rode round the square in great solemnity, except that at each corner they incited the said horses with gratifying regularity to prance and caper about on their hind legs, to the greater glory of their riders. And most remarkable of all was a man, said to be a Chilean spy, who, on a big chestnut—far the best

horse we saw in Bolivia, but meek and peaceful as a cow—seemed to spend the whole day showing the populace, with his spurs, how a fine rider could bestride an almost uncontrollable steed. Those who could not show off their horses or their motor cars showed off themselves and their clothes from morn till dewy eve. And at eve—oh, unforgettable torment—there arrived what purported to be a band; and settled down in the midst of the Plaza, and far into the night wrung from unoffending instruments of the finest English make the most excruciating series of noises that ever mounted from the imagination of Satan. One could smile at those who kept horses or motors mainly for the purpose of showing them off once or twice a year—we all have different ideas of spending a holiday. But for the people who organised, applauded, conducted and played in that vicious band there should be no forgiveness in this world or the next.

We had ample opportunity on this day of studying the fashions in Bolivia. Those followed by the upper classes I need not—and indeed dare not—attempt to describe; they were simply those of Paris or London a few months late, and exceedingly fine. But the others—no, the other, for the peasant class has but one—I must endeavour to grapple with; for here was something characteristic of the country. First—I am sure I am right so far—you had of rigour to have a very full accordion-pleated skirt of ancient tweed, worn with an exceedingly low waist; so low, indeed, that it always looked as if this skirt were on the point of coming off, and I was astounded that it never did. Secondly, whatever else you wore on the upper part of your body—I suppose it was some kind of a blouse—you had to

have a large shawl with lace edges draped round your shoulders; and in this if you owned a baby you carried it on your back, and presumably if you owned twins or triplets you carried the whole community. Thirdly—and nothing was more Mede-ish and Persian than this—you wore on your head a white hat made, I think, of straw; like a panama in texture, but shaped like a plum-pudding or high pork-pie; varnished; fitted with a narrow rigid brim; and, needless to say, incredibly hard and hideous. This hat, I was told, changes neither with the seasons, the lapse of years, the movements of the heavenly bodies, nor even with the Paris fashions; and may be regarded as a thing as fixed and immutable in human life as igneous rock, iron rations, the solar system or the proximity of the poor. Fourthly, and this also was of profound importance, your feet were encased in high-heeled boots with white 'uppers' reaching some way up the leg: and whatever else had to go by the board, you must have these boots; your whole social position as well as the framework of your body had them for base. I think that is all there is for me to describe, though it is not all that exists. Rumour whispers indeed that on feast-days a lady will don all the petticoats she possesses, as many perhaps as a dozen or so; and be careful that their edges all show too, to the confusion and shame of her neighbour who has perhaps but ten or eleven. But I cannot say that I had any ocular evidence of this.

On the whole the general amenities of Oruro were not, I am bound to say, of a nature to tempt one to permanent residence. The ear was apt to be tortured by such sounds as have been described. The nose learned by dire experience to be always on

guard—never more so, by the way, than in our hotel, which appeared to be connected with some chaotic system of underground drainage whose existence we had had good reason to believe impossible. The eye quailed before the ugliness of many of the buildings. The palate shrank in dread from most of the provender set before it. And the stomach—O Jupiter Tonans!—will it ever forget being poisoned three separate times in a fortnight's sojourn at that hotel? Yet despite all these drawbacks there was always one warm, consoling, magnificent compensation—namely the sun, which blazed unfailingly upon us from dawn till dusk, and was always hot enough and never too hot: we had an English summer in fact in December, January and February. And there was too another compensation for the mind as opposed to the body—or rather perhaps I should say for both—namely, the unfailing sun of hospitality that shone upon us from our English and American friends. You have to be in a foreign town like that to see how closely they stick to each other, and how kind they can be to the visitor of their own race.

XIX

After about a fortnight of ferreting and questioning and cross-questioning and higgling and haggling and listening to gentlemen of dark complexion and yet darker designs upon mankind it was announced by Roger that there was nothing more to be gained by talking. We had plenty of mines on paper, and might now go and see what some of them amounted to in fact. There were some half-dozen properties which we thought might be worth a visit; and of them the one we liked best was an abandoned gold mine whose management had confessedly been defective, but whose ore was reported to be very promising. We will call this Santa Maria.

A day or two had to be spent in collecting and packing hammers and chisels, food and beds, candles, tobacco, whisky and other details such as blankets, changes of raiment and cooking things. The majority of these Roger pronounced to be absolutely unnecessary, and for his part would probably have set out with nothing except a panning-shovel, a Colt pistol and a pipe. Cecil and I, however, declined—and, as it proved, wisely—to budge from Oruro without some provision for the elementary needs of the human frame.

"An extra mule for your cigarettes, that means, I know," said Roger resignedly.

"A bite of something to eat after a day underground," retorted Cecil. "We can't eat grass."

"Very well, send home for a chef from the Ritz—I dare say you will get one for a thousand a month."

"If we did he wouldn't be much good without pots and pans."

"We can borrow them."

"I hate borrowing."

"Oh, I thought you hated paying back."

"So I do, and all the more reason, you old bison, for taking our own things and not cadging on other people."

"All right. Only I'm not going to ride about the country like the White Knight with festoons of pots and kettles hung on to me."

"Nobody axed you. Knife, table, one; fork, one; spoon, one; cup, service, one; plate, dinner, one; and there you are."

So it went on, and I thought we should never stop discussing what might be left behind and what must be taken. But at last we really were ready, and at screech of dawn one day we repaired to the station and took our seats for the first stage of our journey.

This began with an hour or so on the main line. Then we changed to a small branch line privately owned by one of the great mining houses, and meandered slowly up a dry river valley to a mining town known as Huanuni.

This lies at the base of a vast mountain scarred and disfigured from head to foot with iron huts, cable-ways and heaps of waste—one of the largest mines in Bolivia. Then for hours and hours our train took us at snail's pace up into the mountains, the only feature of interest being that almost all the way there was another track, without rails, running parallel to ours but about two hundred feet above it. You may suppose from this that it is one of the whims of Bolivia to own and collect railways

without rails, just as an antiquarian may collect pottery or old furniture. But the circumstances were different in this case. When this line was first planned the surveying was done by Germans; and they laid it out and built a great part of it, with cuttings, embankments, masonry for the bridges and everything complete. But when at the outbreak of war the contract with their firm was annulled the English firm which took it over found that in spite of the immense amount of work already done it would be cheaper in the long run to build a fresh track at a lower level and so avoid a great deal of heavy embankment and bridge work. (One likes to think of the heavy commission which those German engineers did *not* earn for totally unnecessary bridges.) Up and up we crawled, doubling time after time on our tracks, and seeming as though we should never reach the little cleft in the crest of the hill which we were told was the summit. At last, however, with monstrous puffing and blowing, the engine managed to reach this crest; and immediately afterwards we reached rail-head.

This was at an altitude of fifteen thousand feet, one of the three highest railways in the world; and it consisted of one or two small buildings forming the station, two or three stores and some sidings. The continuation of the track to Uncia, the enormous mine five and twenty miles away, to serve which the line has been built, was approaching completion; but like other railways of which we have spoken, it was as yet unequipped with rails; and as we could not wait a year, by which time they were expected to be laid, we had to complete our journey to this mine, our first stopping-place, on mule-back.

Five mules and their owner were duly waiting for

us; and had we been able to start at once, two o'clock, as we expected, this journey—some six hours' ride—might not have proved so unpleasant as it did. As it was, Fate selected this moment to remind us once more that we were in South America. Our bags and bed-rolls, we found, were buried deep in one of four big vans. These were conveying not only passengers' luggage, but also potatoes, hay, flour, vegetables and miscellaneous provisions for the thousands of animals, human and otherwise, employed at Llalluagua and Uncia mines. And as a matter of course no one knew in which van they might be. About twenty minutes passed before the station staff began to think of unloading them. When they did, their pace was about one package to every five minutes. Our luggage, as might have been expected, was not to be found in any of the first three vans; and when at last we did catch sight of it sepulchred in potatoes at the bottom of the fourth, we found that we had been kept waiting for more than two hours; it would be four-thirty before we got away, and all the last half of our journey would have to be covered in darkness. I suppose that a man with a properly trained soul would have found recompense for all this in the majestic panorama of mountains which lay about us. But our souls, I regret to say, did not rise to the occasion as they ought to have: our bodies showed resentment of the altitude with shooting pains in the head and splitting ears; and our tempers assumed the condition of rusty saws. It was not a good hour, even in the history of South American mules, when at length the process of loading up was finished and we began to urge our feeble, careless beasts down that wet hill-side.

The ' road ' consisted of an extraordinary number of more or less parallel wheel-tracks where convoy after convoy of carts had sought to find passable ground anywhere but on the ' road ' itself. We saw some of these carts, huge two-wheeled things with eight to a dozen mules harnessed to each, and the whole dozen frequently unequal to the task of dragging them out of a morass or over the big boulders with which the road was strewn. Before and behind each boulder a hole naturally forms, whose depth is increased as wheel after wheel falls into it; and the result is that three mules are needed to do what one could easily do if repairs were ever attempted. They are not, and never will be, now that the railway is coming. Nor have they been at any time, one would judge, except when some vast piece of machinery has had to be transported to the mines. Then a special four-wheeled cart is used; some thirty or forty mules are attached to it, and a gang of men travels with it to render first aid to the road. How even then they manage to convey the loads they do up and down the hills and gorges we travelled remains a mystery. But they do it somehow in the course of two or three days; and it was going to be done very shortly after we passed too; for there were the cylinders of a huge Diesel engine and some halves of gigantic fly-wheels—about ten feet in diameter—waiting at rail-head to be taken to Uncia.

On and on we rode; Cecil reviling in picturesque phrases the shape and ancestry of the South American saddle; I assuring him for his comfort that the first few hours of a ride were nothing to compare with the last few; and Roger, totally callous both in mind and body, telling us time after

time that we must hurry up, otherwise we should lose any chance we possessed of securing beds at the ' hotel ' at Uncia. I do not know whether the saddles we bestrode were relics of the Spanish Inquisition or not, but I do know that, so far as I was concerned—and I think I may speak for Cecil too—no more convincing argument could possibly have been found to turn us to the right faith ; and as we went on and the iron entered farther and farther into our souls—let us call it that—I felt that I would embrace the creed of a Mohammedan or a Manichee or anything that anybody pleased rather than sit another moment in that V-shaped crevice of unyielding wood.

When darkness fell the mules had harder and harder work to find and keep their footing among the rocks ; the pace diminished, and the way seemed longer than ever. I shall not forget one paralysing moment when, seeing above us on a hill a row of bright lights, Cecil and I shouted as with one voice, " Is that Uncia ? " and from Roger the answer came back as though to children complaining without a cause, " Uncia ? No. Llalluagua. Another two hours yet." Whether it was really two hours later or two days that we ached up the chaotic streets of Uncia I cannot say, but I do know that when at last I got out of my crevice my knees refused to perform their office and I had to sit down promptly. Cecil, to my great relief, was almost as bad ; Roger, of course, unaffected and silently contemptuous of our murmurings.

The ' hotel ' was kept by an Italian, and we had been told that it was quite a toss-up whether he would care to take us in or not ; he did not take in everybody who came along. Added to this it was

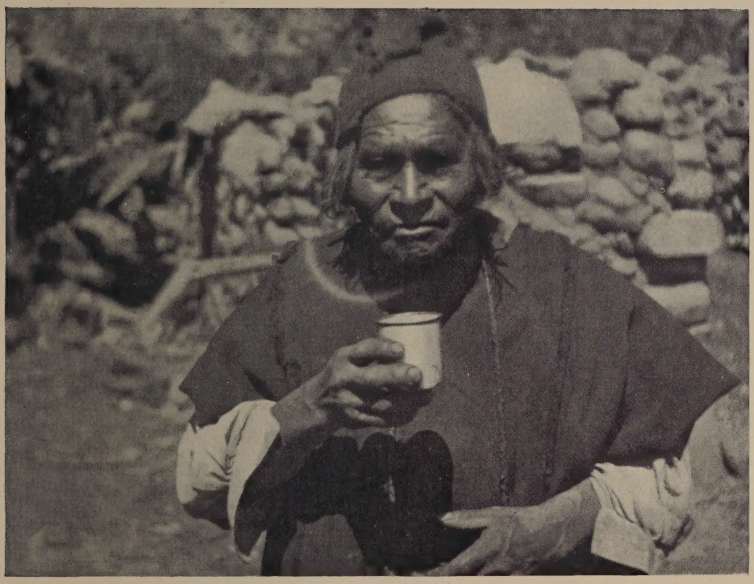
half-past ten at night, and his closed doors and shutters made it only too plain that he and his family had gone to bed. However, we managed to arouse him; and after Roger had soothed him with honeyed words he was kind enough to say that we might have beds and even meat and drink before long, a concession for which we were not a little grateful, having tasted nothing since twelve o'clock midday. The 'hotel' consisted of a dining-room, a bar, a bedroom, and a kind of lobby in which were a pianola and a few chairs. Luckily we had the bedroom to ourselves; yes, and even the three beds, which was more than we had ever expected. Having eaten and drunk, we slept the sleep of the gods—Cecil and I, that is; not, alas, Roger, who had fared exceedingly badly in this respect ever since he came into the country and now did worse than ever. It seems strange that having spent so many years here he alone of us should have been affected by the altitude; but that is how *siroche* descends, upon the just and upon the unjust. You never know how, when or where it will hit you; and a curious feature of the malady is that in some districts it occurs unmistakably in patches: in one part, for example, of a range of hills everybody is affected by it; in another, possibly lower, practically no one. This is a fact well recognised by the natives, who will tell you, "*Siroche* there," or "No *siroche*," and make their plans accordingly. In the Argentine they fight it, and very effectively, with a tea made of coca leaves which, so long as you take it, tides you over the worst of the symptoms. But we never heard of this in Bolivia, nor if we had would Roger ever have touched it. For he is one of those people who despise all minor ailments and, still more, all

remedies. The former are trifles unworthy of notice, and the latter are 'muck,' or, still worse, 'doctors' muck.' And there is no emotion in human nature so strong as the determination on the part of those who take this view not to be 'mucked up by a lot of beastly doctors.'

XX

Our 'hotel,' we found on waking, was quite in the *chic* and fashionable quarter of Uncia. It stood, that is, some three hundred feet above the town, at the top of a barren and rocky slope which formed the big toe of the mountain above. It was next door to the works and offices of the mine, as also to a large 'store' much frequented by the miners. It was within a stone's-throw of the hospital. And I soon had reason to know that it was no farther from the *matadero* (slaughter-house); for the first thing I did on going out of doors was to run full tilt round a corner into a smiling native damsel laden with the bleeding, dripping and gigantic head of a freshly slain bullock; and when I had disentangled myself, not without casualty, from the happy pair I saw that the place of execution was but a few yards from the back of our hotel—and fewer still from the hospital.

Rising far above these buildings—with their varied charms—was a mountain some four thousand feet high (about fifteen thousand aggregate), whose side was marked and gashed at intervals with roads, openings, cable-ways, heaps of refuse and all the paraphernalia of a gigantic mine. Right to the top and over it these activities extended; the mountain, in fact, is the mine and the mine the mountain. It is so large that we were told it would take at least a week to go over it, and so rich—in tin principally, though fourteen different ores are found here—that no one seems to care a straw



Uncia: A Typical Indian

Uncia: Outside our Hotel

whether it is run at maximum profit or not. The principal owner, a Bolivian, lives in France, and has made so much out of it that he does not need to worry about such questions as output per man—does anyone in South America? He has but to burrow farther and farther into the mountain; and out comes fortune after fortune, destined apparently to go on till the mountain itself is no more. We were told that many years ago a celebrated engineer 'turned down' the ore deposits here as unworthy of attention. One would like to know in what asylum the poor fellow is harboured now, and what he would think if he knew the profits which are supposed to have come out of it—actual figures are not disclosed. Such errors, however, are not to be taken too seriously in a country like Bolivia, where life is one long gamble with the earth, and the whole atmosphere is one of colossal enterprises, hits and misses.

At Uncia we stayed for two days collecting further provender—and skin—and receiving very kind treatment from the deputy manager, an American engineer, who in the absence of the manager did everything he could to help us. He was even good enough to lend us mules for half our journey to Santa Maria; and on these mules—very much better than anything we had seen in Bolivia as yet—we duly started early on the third morning, and made our way once more through the cobbled streets and varied smells of Uncia to the plain below. There were some three miles of plain. Then came a river to be forded, and then a long climb up a big range of hills. After about three hours' riding in all we came to the top of this, and then beheld what I had not previously seen in Bolivia and could hardly

believe to be real—namely, a broad, flat fertile valley covered with young corn of the most intense and vivid green. In many parts of the country this would be quite common; for as I have said some two-thirds of Bolivia's territory lies at a comparatively low altitude, and with a tropical sun overhead you can grow almost anything you like to plant. But I had seen nothing of all this on my journey, only the mountains and the desert; and my first view of this great 'weald' of corn-land, with its dazzling colour and its impression of fertility and plenty, was wonderfully striking; giving ocular demonstration as it did that the country as a whole is not so arid a wilderness as my experience of it had suggested.

To get to this land of promise the way led down a sort of step-ladder of slippery boulders, so steep that it looked as if once started we should not need to trouble about foothold till we touched bottom some four hundred feet below. Even our chaperon (a magnificent Chilean gentleman with huge and richly adorned leather riding-boots and sumptuous bridle and reins) gave us the somewhat unnecessary advice that we had better not try to ride down. And we didn't. For my part I began the descent with a quite unnecessary fall off my mule through not getting my leg clear of the letter V when dismounting; and I descended on my back with such a thud that Roger and Cecil declared that the mountains shook and changed their shape at the impact, and begged me not to do it again lest I disturb the formation of the country and perhaps spoil a promising vein of ore. When I had carried out repairs and finished expressing my opinion of them we duly started down the step-ladder, leading

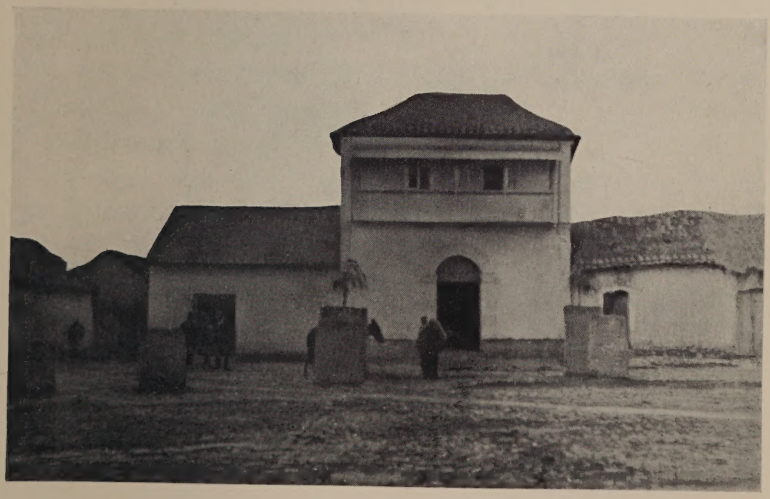
our mules; and in course of time managed to fall and slither safely to the bottom. Then we had about two miles along the valley, passing a small mud village on our way; and then we arrived at the big village of Chayanta.

This though also compact of mud is distinguished among its fellows by the possession of a huge church and a good-sized cobbled plaza; and speaks aloud of the Spanish occupation, which began about 1535 and lasted nearly three centuries. The church itself is built of the usual material, but it has somehow managed to remain standing since it was built, possibly two or three hundred years ago; and its size—far more imposing than my poor photograph will suggest—indicates that a very big community must have grown up around it. No doubt the place was a great centre of mining enterprise in its day, and was also rendered important by the big stretch of fertile land amidst which it lies. The province of Chayanta is said to have produced many thousand ounces of gold for the Spaniards; and we may be sure that the town of the same name was an active centre, seeing much of the gold stored and some of it spent before it went over the mountains and the sea to Spain. Now the glory is departed: nothing is left to mine except a little alluvial tin which is taken out of the local streams; and the 'town' is just a collection of mud huts in straight lines, rich in dirt, smells and decay and nothing else.

Of these huts the only one possessed of two storeys was to be our abode for the night. This belonged to a Bolivian gentleman who was apparently the principal citizen of the place and, one would judge, the only prosperous one; and it consisted of a small shop on the ground floor which seemed to be the

Whiteley's of Chayanta, and a small single room above it which was the 'hotel.' Even for Bolivia this room did not come up to one's ordinary idea of a hotel. Indeed, had I not been told, I should have taken it for the annexe or overflow room of the 'Whiteley's' below; for it contained among other things—Mr Pelman himself could hardly remember them all—a huge pile of bedding, a number of books, one or two tables, a chair, a typewriter, a gramophone, sacks and sacks of tin ore, the clothing of several ladies, a gun, a rifle, two or three loaves, some cooking-pots, a mandolin, some flour, a pair of trousers, a cruet-stand, some dirty plates, a sack of potatoes, a flute, and a top-hat, and it was difficult at first to see where we were going to find room to eat, let alone sleep, except in the posture of a dog in his basket. However, either the room grew larger or we grew smaller; for when in the process of the ages food and drink were brought to us there flowed in also, like a spring-tide, a crowd of Bolivian gentlemen and children; who squeezed into every vacant corner of the room, filled up the doorway, even competed for the steps outside (which were the only means of access), and there remained staring, smiling and whispering to each other till our meal was finished. I counted eleven in the room—where one had satisfied our need—and to this day do not know how they found space to stand, much less how we managed to breathe. Roger kept telling us how they enjoyed this, and what nice, sociable people they were; also kept talking to them in their own tongue whenever he was not otherwise engaged. Cecil and I meanwhile almost drew sparks from the air with our murmured comments upon their appearance, odour and ancestry;

The Church, Chayanta



Our Hotel at Chayanta

and if they had had any glimmering of what we said there would certainly have been business for the magistrate that day, as also for the coroner and undertaker, who presumably were the same person and not different from the principal witness—namely our host. However, there was no syllable of English among them, and we could say what we liked; which was principally that an earthquake or Dies Irae would be preferable to sitting another moment in that room.

At last we managed to escape; and sought the streets of Chayanta, which certainly did not prove much more attractive. The church, alas, was firmly closed; so we could not see more than its dilapidated exterior; and the only thing we could find to do was to wander out among the corn-fields outside the village and speculate upon the only two features of interest there visible. Firstly, the little shrines, something like 'pepper-pots,' which crowned the summits of many of the lower hills. (The native Bolivian, who we must remember is largely of Indian blood, is full of strange beliefs and superstitions about good and bad spirits, and puts up these shrines with the hope of attracting the good and discouraging the bad against attacks on his crops, person and property.) And secondly, the burrowings which were visible on many of the higher hillsides, the work of generation after generation of miners who have hoped to find Eldorado here. Whether they were of Spanish date or Inca or pre-Inca no one can tell. All that is certain is that no son of man ever dwelt here for long without mining for something; and apparently, by the records, he found a good deal; but it could not have been on any of the hills within our sight, for none of the

burrows suggested that they had been carried much below the surface.

Having seen the sights we concluded arrangements with our magistrate-host to provide us with mules next day; purchased from him our final instalments of food and drink; and besought 'whatever gods there be' that our evening meal might be a little less public. It was not.

The trip from Chayanta to Santa Maria was not long; but it lay over a very steep range of hills, and we were told that it would probably take six hours. It did: and the wonder was that it was ever accomplished at all, for after riding about three hours, always climbing, we came apparently to the wall of a house some three thousand feet high. That there was a path up it of any kind seemed a miracle; but a path there was, and a very good one for South America. Up and up and up it zigzagged, most admirably engineered; and though we refrained from looking downwards, and felt as though the blink of one eyelid without the other might over-balance the mule and send us both toppling into the gully below, we did in fact ascend without mishap of any kind, the mules for once seeming to think that they had got something to do that was worth doing, and so never putting a foot wrong from start to finish. Once on the roof of the house we could gaze down placidly at the wall and wonder how it had been scaled. And the more placidly still because on the other side the slope was by comparison gentle; and further, we could see on a hill-side in the distance the buildings and slack-heaps of the haven where we would be—namely, the Santa Maria gold mine.

XXI

Now the history of our stay at Santa Maria was for me a history of woe; for on the afternoon of our arrival, being exhausted and parched with thirst, I drank a sea of whisky-and-water—unfortunately almost all water—and in a few hours was possessed of the devil, the devil of dysentery. The Italian gentleman who lived at the mine and acted as its nurse and caretaker assured me later on that "Manee who gom here have ze dysentery." But the satisfaction of doing in Rome as the Romans did was in this case tempered by the reflection that he might have spoken sooner. Luckily Roger and Cecil who really mattered were unaffected; and so were able to pursue their work.

The mine-buildings, such as they were, stood on a tiny plateau a little way up a steep hill of some eighteen hundred feet. Here were the principal entrance to the mine, the caretaker's house, a few roofless remains of huts, and a yard surrounded by a wall. That was all. The mine had been abandoned eight years before; and for most of that time had had no caretaker, so that any material such as roofing which had not been taken away by the owners had long ago vanished into thin air—though we were reminded by the presence of a small native village at the foot of the hill of the immutable law that 'Matter is indestructible.' We soon installed ourselves in the one hut which possessed a roof as well as walls, and this for some days remained our abode—bedroom, boudoir, library,

dining-room, study and also hospital. Luckily I had my camp-bed with me and so was comparatively well off; but Roger and Cecil, by the former's advice, had brought nothing but their blankets and a cork mattress each; and they had to make the best they could of some iron roofing-sheets supported on piles of earth and stones. I shall not easily forget the rasp of these sheets as we put them in place, nor the sound they were apt to make whenever the sleepers moved. But still better shall I remember the rasp in Cecil's voice when he set to work to inform Roger of his shortcomings as a traveller, and desired to know why he had been brought bedless into the desert. Did he suppose that camp-beds grew upon the mountains? Or had he spent so short a time among human beings that he thought they slept like animals on the ground? The retort was naturally an apology for not having brought bath-salts, eider-downs, spring mattresses and hot-water bottles. But I was constrained to think that the vote of censure was well deserved; though at the same time I could not refrain from goading Cecil to madness now and then as he lay on his iron sheet by mentioning the 'give,' dryness, cosiness and warmth of a camp-bed. As it proved, the last-named quality was badly needed; for the weather turned nasty directly we arrived, and remained so throughout our stay. Snow, sleet, frost and storms of cold wind and rain were almost incessant; and after the sunshine of Oruro they were not acceptable, especially as the boudoir let most of them through.

The hill was covered with old workings, probably of Spanish origin; and we came to the conclusion that of the thousands of ounces which I have

mentioned a good proportion must have come from here, for there is no other gold deposit in the province of Chayanta so well known as this. We were puzzled, however, by the magnitude of the figures; for the successful extraction of gold is decidedly a modern accomplishment, and to win so much with the crude methods then in vogue must have meant a fabulous amount of mining. Possibly a good deal came from alluvial beds, which may have been immensely rich. And no doubt a good deal more came not directly from nature's treasury, but by 'direct action' from private hoards which had been gleaned in the course of years from the rivers, and by methods that our own century cannot hope to improve upon. Whatever the truth Santa Maria was probably one of the chief sources, and there was no doubt a good deal of honest mining done here; for besides the surface burrowings we know that the Spaniards drove a tunnel into the hill and did a certain amount of development to right and left. What they got out of it all we can only guess.

It is worth while perhaps to pause and try to realise the disabilities under which they had to work. Needless to say there was no electric drill in those days, no high explosive and no cyanide process of extraction. These are but a thing of yesterday, even for us. So that all mining had to be done with hammer and chisel, and with black powder probably of a very inferior kind. Then, far more serious, in the absence of steam they had no power of any kind, unless you count the feeble and intermittent water supply which is sometimes available in Bolivia: and that meant no stamping mills; all crushing to be done by hand; and no engine-driven pumps, which left them at the mercy of any water in the mine.

Geology and mineralogy were almost unknown terms; there could have been no theory—certainly no sound theory—in their mining, only practice; and when they came to any complexity or serious impurity in an ore they were beaten in the first round. Methods of extraction were still probably those of the Phœnicians; and if you want proof of this you have but to go to the famous silver mines of Potosi in the same province, and see how to this day men are growing rich on the 'tailings' left by the Spaniards—that is, the refuse ore from which they could not or did not care to extract any more silver. One advantage and only one they had in their mining, so far as we can see; and that was, if one may dare to whisper it in these days, a plentiful supply of—er—unexacting labour. It was not till 1780 that we hear of any organised rebellion among the Indians against the frightful cruelty of their oppressors, and not till 1824 that their efforts were crowned with success. All things considered it is a marvel that even with forced labour they accomplished so much as they did; and if we in these days can look with pity upon their archaic proceedings, it is not by any means certain that our profits show an increase proportionate to that of our efficiency. We have problems, in fact, of a far more complex and costly kind to deal with. Cyanide plant is very expensive and needs a highly-skilled and highly-paid man to look after it. Labour asks for much and gives little; and in other countries, though not so far in Bolivia, is frequently difficult to handle. Machinery costs a mint of money, and owing to its weight is not easy to convey. Water and timber supply are both far more serious questions in these days, when so much more of both is

needed. Altogether we have not made the business quite so much easier as might be imagined. And the only set of conditions, one supposes, which would really satisfy the mine-manager of to-day would be a combination, like the hymn-book, of Ancient and Modern. Give him the Spanish simplicities of the sixteenth century—property to be had for the taking and labour for the cost of a whip and the funeral expenses of those who ran away. Give him the engines, plant, and methods of extraction of to-day; the scientific knowledge; and the hundred-and-twenty shillings an ounce to which we have seen gold rise in our time; and you will know at any rate one man who is not looking for a more complete life after death. But alas, this is but a dream that passeth. If only slavery—oh Larkin what am I saying?

The mine of to-day, we found, consisted of a main tunnel about a hundred yards long, a number of passages branching off it, and a low-level tunnel some eighty feet below it, which one reached by clambering down a jagged, steeply sloping rabbit-hole, inky-dark and just wide enough to admit a man's body. I say advisedly one; for I, to tell the naked truth, never succeeded in reaching it at all. Even outside the mine I found myself too weak to do much walking. Directly I got far inside it along the upper tunnel the bad air, coupled with the labour of scrambling over heaps of refuse in semi-darkness, turned me contemptibly faint. And the idea of climbing down and up that rabbit-hole eighty feet deep in almost total darkness was out of the question, even had Roger and Cecil agreed thereto. As it was, they made up disgusting statistics as to the number of mules which would be needed to draw the carcase of a man of my weight

out of the rabbit-hole—including 'F.' (friction)—and flatly declined to enter it at all if I did; so that was that. I went a little way with them into the dark dripping tunnel with its jagged sides, its pools of water and streamlets running among the rusty tram-lines; with its heaps of shale and refuse, and its atmosphere of 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here': and I heard Cecil exclaim as he groped his way towards the mouth of the chimney, lantern in hand, "Oo, isn't this good? Good to be underground again. I *am* sorry you can't come all the way. It would have been so interesting." Then he and subsequently Roger squirmed down the rabbit-hole into the bowels of the earth; and I crept back to the blessed daylight, marvelling that there should be men alive who really considered this 'good' and yet remained outside an asylum.

With these two lunatics went a couple of Indians employed by the Italian, who were to show them the way. He had leave from the owners of the mine to get what ore he could out of it; and he kept these two men always at work blasting away at the veins on the lower level, and crushing what they brought up by hammer at the mouth of the mine. Some weeks he made a tidy profit and other weeks nothing at all. Granted a streak of luck in the development of the veins he might have made a good deal; for he had a sound knowledge of mining and would not have missed any chance that came his way. But the chance had not come as yet, and he was beginning to think it never would. Such is the fate of those who woo Fortune out of the earth.

And what was our fate? We who were going to woo her in proper style if at all.

Alas, it was no better. For the best part of four

Santa Maria: Principal Entrance to the Mine

Santa Maria: The 'Boudoir'

days Roger and Cecil went round and round that mine, carefully noting what had to be noted, examining the formation, taking samples, measuring distances, testing previous accounts, and forming plans of what might be done in case they found it possible to recommend any further outlay. But at the end of that time they had to decide that it was quite impossible. Of ten or more veins of gold-bearing rock in the hill only four, according to previous reports, had anything like enough breadth to be worth pursuing. During the long abandonment of the mine practically all the gold-bearing rock within reach had been removed by Indians who inherited the Spaniards' ideas on the subject of property. The Italian, quite naturally and within his rights, had taken any fragments that remained —not many basketsful. The problem of taking samples was thus rendered extremely difficult; and over a great part of the exposed surface it was impossible, for there was nothing left to sample. Without an expenditure of some hundreds or thousands of pounds to open up veins and test them properly no one could form a proper idea of the mine's potentialities. And even that expenditure they did not feel inclined to recommend. For not only were the veins too narrow to give any unusual promise of success, but in their view the quartz was 'cold' and 'milky' and did not offer any temptation to proceed with it. If a man had £10,000 to play with and spent it on development he might make the mine succeed and he might not. It was a toss-up. At all events that sum would have to be spent on it to give any chance of success. And there was therefore no alternative but to admit failure on this venture, and try our luck elsewhere.

XXII

After four days and five nights, then, most of which were spent by Roger and Cecil in that Avernus to which they found the descent so easy, we decided that it was useless to stay longer, and Roger and I made ready to go back to Oruro, he to make fresh plans for further expeditions and I to seek a doctor for repairs. Cecil was to go on some two days' journey beyond Santa Maria to look at another gold deposit, of which our Italian friend had heard some wonderful accounts. With him went an Indian to show him the way and act as batman; but as neither knew a word of the other's language there were doubts as to his utility in the latter sphere. We left Cecil our remaining tobacco, provisions, candles, whisky and a large stock of good advice; but I am sorry to say he only thanked us for the whisky and tobacco.

For my part I left Santa Maria without any regret, having spent most of my time there huddled up in blankets in our highly ventilated boudoir watching the snow and sleet drive against the hill. There was a ten or eleven hours' mule-ride between us and Uncia, no *fiesta* in my present condition. However, we arranged to stop at Chayanta for a couple of hours in the middle of the day for rest and food, and so made the best of it. I did not dare attempt the food, but was only too glad of the rest. And there was too another delight, or rather a mirage, dangled for a moment before my eyes—namely, something that was called 'soda-water.' My ailment

had of course involved incessant thirst; and the water at Santa Maria being impossible, I had had nothing to drink for several days except beer, which made me thirstier than before. Now at 'Whiteley's' I beheld bottles of soda-water; and thought to myself, "Good. Here is a really clean drink at last, with no taste or sweetness in it. I wonder how many bottles there are." But behold, when I tried it I found it to be a sweet and cloying mess like very sweet and rather flat lemonade; and though I drank of it because there was nothing else to drink my thirst increased rather than diminished. That was not one of the moments when I blessed the land and liquids of Bolivia.

The afternoon's ride of six hours was carried out under a blazing sun; and what with the heat, the thirst, the contemptible condition of my body, and the never-ceasing pressure of the letter V, I do not hanker to repeat it: it seemed as though the earth had suddenly stretched like the neck of Alice in Wonderland and the journey become double its former length. We reached the Uncia hotel about six in the evening; and then, thought I, I would have a drink; such a drink as man had never had before and never would enjoy again; such as people have dreamed of in fever but never got; such as would correspond in rank and dignity with the desert in my throat. Not mere water, or soda-water, or beer, or anything ignoble or gummy of that sort; but something rich and cold and rare, clean and clear and fizzy, stimulating as well as quenching, lasting as well as sharp; something which would flow steadily but not too swiftly into every corner of my arid frame. Champagne of course it must be, champagne the ineffable, champagne at any price

they liked to ask. Three pounds a bottle was about what they asked. But I paid it, and gladly: was not this one of the occasions in life when money is mere dross beside what it will buy? I bought it proudly. I scanned the label—"Pommery 1911"—like a man in love. I took the bottle in my hands. ('Love in her eyes sits playing.') I opened it. I poured. I waited, yes one exquisite moment, with the glass before me. I raised it and drank. And then "Ouf—ouf—OUF!"—I banged it down again and thrust the stuff away. It was raw, sweet aerated apple-juice, brewed in Chile and bottled—in a place where we shall no doubt be exceedingly glad to get it. I was sold; my dream shattered; my money gone, and my thirst still with me. I handed the bottle to Roger and told him to finish it if he could; in my present condition I dared not take the risk. He made the effort, in instalments, and said that if you thought of it as adulterated cider and not as wine at all it was quite fairly easy to keep down.

Bed and a doctor followed; and for three days and nights I thought this 'hotel' at Uncia the brightest and best place in the world—such is the effect of contrast. There was a good deal of snow, with blazing sunshine in between; and the nights were cold enough to suggest what the winter must be at this altitude. Here we were in January, the middle of summer, and it was not too easy even to keep warm in bed. What must it be in winter when the cold is far worse and fuel is poor, difficult to get and ruinous in price?

My ailment grew no better; but now I had at least the clean, safe drink I needed—namely, distilled water; and on that I rejoiced exceedingly—has anyone ever rejoiced on distilled water before, I

wonder? The manager of the mine was all kindness; and even offered to send me by carriage to rail-head whenever I wanted to go. But unfortunately his offer was nipped in the bud by an untimely incident: for the wife of the *cochero* had selected this moment—of all others—to stab him in the arm during a domestic discussion; and had done the job so thoroughly that he would not be able to drive again for several days. I trust I may be forgiven for hoping that the honours of battle did not rest exclusively with Madame.

While we were still at Uncia Cecil arrived from his trip; and I was pleased to note that he like myself fell rather than dismounted from his mule, so thoroughly was he cooked and finished. He had ridden ten hours with very little to eat or drink, and was hardly able to stand or speak for weariness; so we plied him with food and the remaining champagne before plying him with questions, and even let him smoke two or three cigarettes without molesting him. Then he told us that he had really not fared badly; the Indian had been quite useful and civil, and the journey not unpleasant, except that there had been too much of it. One hectic moment he recalled when going round a corner he suddenly found himself embarked upon a long and narrow knife-edged ridge between two precipices of some two thousand feet. It was too late to stop and go back; for the mule had already advanced some yards along the knife, and there was no room either to turn or dismount. Consequently he had to ride from end to end of the ridge, silently imploring the gods that the mule might refrain from stumbling, and wondering, if it did, into which of the gorges on either side he would fall. As

it happened the mule did refrain, and they arrived at the farther end without disaster. But it was touch-and-go all the way, a place that he should on no account have been allowed to ride.

When he arrived at his destination he found that the man to whom he had been recommended was a pure-bred Indian; not a word of whose language he could understand, and vice versa. The Indian, however, was thoroughly hospitable; offered him one of his two rooms to sleep in; and after supper produced a pack of cards of historic antiquity and filth, with which he invited Cecil to play. What the game was Cecil could form no idea; however, he did his best, and as no money passed it did not matter. The night was less pleasant: for though the room was supposed to be set apart for him alone he never woke without being conscious of people passing in and out of it; without lights, and always so softly that he could not help suspecting designs on his property. So that he lay awake for a considerable time with his revolver ready. However, he missed nothing next day; so presumed that his suspicions had been unworthy.

The gold reef turned out to be a poor specimen of its kind—more antimony than gold and no great amount of either. The Indian strongly urged him to go and inspect yet another gold deposit, far richer, another two days' journey into the mountains: but Cecil had had enough of gold deposits by this time; and besides that had no great confidence in this or any Indian's regard for life or property; so rejected the proposal and on the following day rode back to Uncia.

Next morning we were aroused from sleep at five o'clock; and in the chill dawn outside beheld

men and mules waiting in that ghoulish and reproachful silence which in all countries marks the creatures who arrive at an unearthly hour of the morning to claim our luggage for the 'early train.' We had to catch a train this time; two o'clock from rail-head; and to be sure of getting it should be on the road thither at least by half-past six. So there could be no turning in bed this morning for another snooze. Since I was possibly going to faint on the way, was probably going to be sick, and was certainly going to need a rest or two, I was sent off half-an-hour ahead of the others, who remained behind to pack up and pay. I was sick, and that not once nor twice. I also bore with me a thirst in which the Amazon river might easily have dried up. But I managed to leave out the rest of the programme; and though in a vastly contemptible state reached rail-head nearly half-an-hour in front of the others, which I thought very creditable. When they did arrive we learned that there had been a landslip on the line that morning—the first that had ever happened in its history—and though there was an engine and truck on our side of it there was some doubt if anything could or would be done to get us through to Oruro. If not we should have no choice but to ride back to Uncia again, another six hours' ride, wait there another two days, and then do the journey all over again. Were we down-hearted? We *were*.

After an hour or two, however, a telegram came through to say that the engine and truck were coming up to fetch us, and we were to go on foot over the landslip and there join a train waiting on the other side. In the course of another hour or two the engine and truck arrived; and after several

more hours as it seemed we started packed like sardines in the truck, and duly reached the landslip. Over this we clambered carrying our bags, and got into the train on the other side of it. And there, thank heaven, there was a restaurant car in which the others could eat and I could drink. This time—I am sure you are anxious to know—it was Ross's dry ginger ale, at three-and-six a bottle; and it was the *real thing*, something real at last. We reached Oruro late in the evening; and I sent without delay for a Chilean doctor, who certainly seemed to know his business. He announced that there was only one cure for dysentery in these days—chlorodyne is but a palliative—namely injections of essence of ipecacuanha, a remedy discovered during the campaign in Mesopotamia and now universally used. It was rather striking to find a man so up-to-date in his knowledge at a place like Oruro, or indeed anywhere in South America; but I am told that this is by no means unusual among the Chileans; for all their budding doctors, engineers and others needing a scientific training go to Europe to get it, and return there too from time to time to keep themselves in touch. (So I believe do some of the Bolivians.) My doctor had been trained in Paris, and was shortly going to England for yet another eighteen months' training. Meanwhile he assured me I should be cured within a fortnight; but must live on milk for nearly half that time, avoid meat like the poison it was, and keep as quiet as I could. A disgusting sentence, for it meant that I could not leave Oruro again for a week or ten days. However, there was no help for it, and I had to do what I was told.

XXIII

While I remained at Oruro being punctured and replenished with ipecacuanha—the result, I hasten to add, is not that which comes from using it as a beverage—Roger and Cecil went different ways; the former to inspect the Widow's Cruse, the latter to visit an ancient Spanish silver mine which had always been reputed very rich, but had been left derelict for many years. The former returned after some days pleased with what he had seen, but feeling that he needed three or four weeks on the mine to make up his mind about it. The latter found the tunnels and passages cut by the Spaniards so fallen in and so full of debris that he could not form any opinion on it; half-a-dozen men would be needed for a fortnight or more to clear away the rubbish. This applies, of course, to almost every derelict mine, and it is always a question whether the results of the clearing will justify the cost. In this case we felt that there were many other properties on our list which would better repay the same outlay of time and money, and so we decided to leave it alone and try elsewhere.

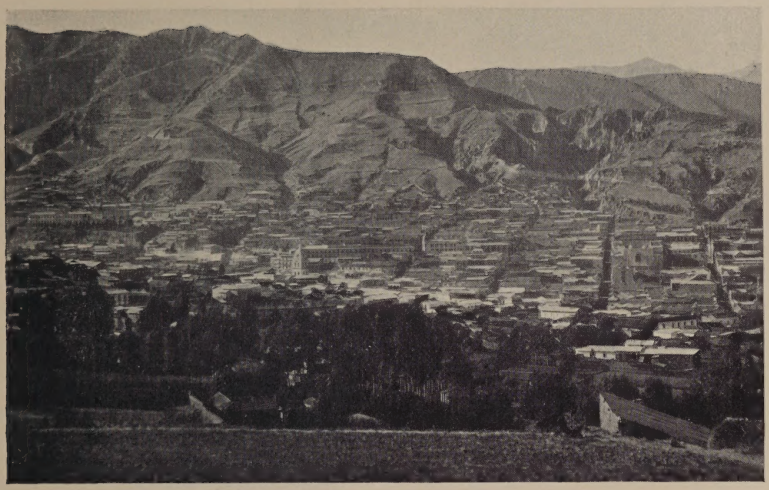
We did try elsewhere; and the Recording Angel will, I hope, have noted where we tried and give us due credit for our efforts: so many miles covered, so many mules whacked, so many inches of skin lost, so many days spent in the 'V,' and so many nights in rest-houses—*i.e.* mud huts with raised slabs of earth to sleep on. It was all very much the same; and as one journey in Bolivia is very like another I

do not propose to give details of any more. Suffice it that in the course of some weeks we had formed a good idea of the properties which were worth having and those which were not; and it remained for Roger and Cecil to inspect them more closely and take samples and drawings of those with which we hoped to deal. Five or six of these seemed exceedingly promising; and when we had secured full plans and details of these we felt that we should have a dish sufficiently attractive to tempt any enterprising investor, and ought to have no difficulty in raising sufficient capital for their development.

Having reached this stage, we had done all that the three of us together intended to do, and as a trio we came to an end. Roger and Cecil were to spend the necessary time in inspecting the properties and securing full details. Then Roger was to remain in the country and secure employment, either temporary or permanent, this being the country he knew best; and Cecil was to go home and help me to bait the hook for the shy and shrinking capitalist. (Please do not conclude from this that our transactions were necessarily 'fishy': as a matter of fact none of us have ever been able to see how it can pay a mining engineer to be anything but honest; his whole success seems to depend on his being absolutely reliable in character and capacity.) As for me there was nothing left for me to do now in Bolivia, and I set about making arrangements to leave it—without tears.

But how and which way?

Not the way I had come by, that was quite certain. Might I not be kept waiting a whole month perhaps at Tupiza? A week in the company of the comb? Or even several weeks at La Quiaca,



La Paz

Among the Mountains

attending the convenience of strikers? No, no. Putting aside all thought of the 'V' torture that route was far too full of hazard and uncertainty to to be faced again. The sea and the Transandine Railway must be my way this time. And to get to the sea I could go by rail either to Antofogasta or else to La Paz and Arica. Everyone advised me to take the latter route, since no one could be said to have seen Bolivia who had not seen La Paz and the ruins of the Inca or Aztec buildings. I have no doubt they were right and I ought to have obeyed. But there was Time with a big scythe on my right hand, counting up the number of weeks I had been away from the Half; and Mammon with a bailiff on my left, threatening writs and proceedings if I spent a *boliviano* more than was necessary; so I had to give up all thought of taking the more attractive route and set my face for Antofogasta.

In ordinary times and with ordinary luck I ought apparently to be in Buenos Aires within ten days; namely two nights and a day to the coast, four days and five nights along the coast to Valparaiso, and three days and two nights thence to Buenos Aires. But I was not surprised to hear—nor I think will you be—that this was not an ordinary time, and I must not look for ordinary luck. Reports from the coast said that the coasting boats were crammed with American tourists, seeking Nirvana in the bars and restaurants of a country better governed than their own; and I might be kept for days or even weeks at Antofogasta waiting for a vacant berth. Reports also said that the Transandine Railway was closed owing to landslips and floods following the melting of the snow; and even if I got to Valparaiso I might have to wait there yet further days or weeks

till the trains began to run again. Altogether the hazards and difficulties of this route seemed almost as great as those of the other; and I began to think, as I had often thought before since entering Bolivia, that I really never should get out of it alive again nor revel in those lovely and pleasant things—English management, English efficiency and English ideas of Time.

However, the attempt must obviously be made, and by the Transandine route. So expecting nothing but kicks at the boot of Fate I took leave one evening, with real regret, of the other two Asses—sketching for them with no little detail the excellent meals I should be having within a few days—and without any regret whatever of Oruro and its smells. During the night and much of the following day the line took us over flat, arid and uninteresting plains with hills in the distance and mirages on the flat, but hardly any vegetation. Then we began to climb; and climbed for hours up into the Andes, I do not know how high, probably six thousand feet or so, anyhow a most wearisome distance. You will probably assume that we saw some very wonderful scenery, and that having had the luck to see this I shall spend the remainder of my life exclaiming: "Mountains? Scenery? Oh, but you should just see the Andes!" But therein you will be mistaken. For in the first place my friends are for the most part powerful men; and in the second, even if they were not, I should not feel inclined to exclaim anything of the sort. Beyond some three or four snow-capped peaks of conical shape which were certainly very impressive, and occasionally a gorge or a jagged rock or a great valley which one would not like to have missed,

there was nothing that struck me as particularly grand. Whatever their aggregate height, it must be remembered these mountains spring from a plain which is already ten or twelve thousand feet above the sea, so that much of the effect is bound to be lost. Then the railway naturally approaches them very gradually; so that there is seldom or never a moment when you can look up suddenly and say, "There are ten or fifteen thousand feet of mountain." And when you are among them the climb is so slow and tedious that you are soon apt to feel you have had enough of them. For hours you creep almost at walking pace up one side of a precipitous valley. Then perhaps you cross it and for other hours creep back along the other side, always climbing. Repeat this three or four times a day; add that you never see any vegetation, nothing but bare grey-brown stone and sand; and you have the ingredients of a very promising boredom. For my part, I do not hesitate to own that I did and do regard the Andes as a bore. I had looked upon them and lived with them and ridden up them and slithered down them and been baked and frozen and sick and sore in them for so long that I did not want to look at them any more; and would have put a bomb under them if I had thought that that would quicken my journey to Antofogasta. Certainly I never saw on this journey—or any other in South America—anything approaching the grandeur and beauty of the mountains at La Corona, where they rise sixteen or seventeen thousand feet sheer from the plain and are aflame with colour and vegetation.

At last we reached the summit; and the train crept slowly down the opposite side; almost as

slowly as it had crept up, for the gradient is very steep and it is never safe to let the engine have its head. The steepest part was covered at night, so that we missed seeing the engineering of the line, which is said to be very remarkable; and we also passed—though whether we missed much I do not know—the various sights which Chile has here to offer—namely, the water supply of Antofogasta, which lies a hundred and ninety-five miles from the town; a lake of borax at Cebollar, and a large number of nitrate-fields. Here we were in the rainless belt, the land where for half-a-century at a time you do not need an umbrella; then only for ten minutes, and then can put it away again for another half-century. Perhaps you will not be there all that time, but your heirs may; and if you train them carefully they will know quite well what to do with the thing if it should rain during their lifetime, as it very likely may.

Antofogasta is a place of commerce pure and simple, existing only to export ore and nitrates, and to import such things as Bolivia and the north of Chile need; nor does it offer any attraction to the eye, except perhaps as you look out to the sea with its brilliant blue and its island rocks a little way out. The town itself lies on a narrow barren slope between the sea and a range of precipitous hills—painted here and there with gigantic advertisements. It is arranged on the American plan, the streets all straight and at right angles to each other; houses, shops, warehouses, kinemas, churches and offices huddled together without discrimination; and many of them made of, or roofed with, corrugated iron, most horrible to see. Behind it lie the barren brown hills; and on either side of it lie miles and miles of

A Lake in the Andes at about ten thousand feet

La Plaza, Cochabamba

barren sea-coast, where rain never falls and vegetation is not, but where by contrast the precious nitrates have never been solved and washed into the earth and so remain solid for English companies to take. I like to think of the generosity which Nature here displays in compensating one man for the misfortunes of another. For if you ask the dago who works in these nitrate-fields what he thinks of life in the barren desert, where amusement is not, rain never falls, and even a garden presumably is impossible, you will perhaps be answered with a knife between your ribs. But if you watch the English shareholder fingering his dividend warrant and thanking the gods that his company has done so well, you will soon see Nature's system of balance, recompense, constant equilibrium. You don't see it? Well, perhaps it is easier if you are a shareholder. I am.

Tons and tons of nitrate are shipped from Antofogasta every year; so also are tons and tons of ore from Bolivia, which has no sea-coast of her own and can only import or export here or at Arica. Herein is a terrible and lasting grievance, and a very natural one too. For up to about 1880 this port and a great tract of the coast, as much as thirty thousand square miles, including many of the nitrate-fields, belonged to Bolivia. Then Chile which has been called, whether rightly or wrongly, the Germany of South America beheld — as in a vision — that so weak a nation had no real right to possess such a valuable piece of territory, and was inspired by its conscience to take it and add it to her own. Bolivia was thus deprived of her one harbour, as well as of a strip of land of inestimable wealth; and now has to pay Chile (indirectly) for the privilege of using

ports which she has every right to regard as her own. No wonder she appeals now and then to the Great Powers for assistance. She has certainly been badly treated. At the same time one cannot help feeling that the present state of things is best for the world in general. For it is certain that she would never have displayed the vigour and efficiency in opening up the nitrate-fields which Chile has shown. One *Chileno*, to put the thing in a nutshell, is apt to be worth a good many *Bolivianos*—and one Englishman a round dozen of either.

XXIV

With all its drawbacks Antofogasta is for me a place of shining memories; for here first, almost since leaving the Argentine, did I sleep in a bedroom that did not wound the nose on entry, and ate food which anyone could recognise at sight to be human. It was true that this bedroom lay deep in the belly of a huge wooden hotel; had light and air only of a minute skylight; and suggested nothing so much as a hot packing-case or 'hay-box' constructed by an amateur carpenter. But at least it was clean, bare and free from smell and vermin; and to one coming from the dug-outs of Bolivia it was as though 'Innisfree' had grown from dreams into reality, and mine eyes had seen that which Mr Yeats could only imagine. Moreover there was a restaurant there with great meat and drink. A 'block' or two away there was an English club with plenty of papers and soft chairs—I was still glad of the latter. There was a plaza, a vivid patch of green with trees, shrubs and flowers all kept aflame by constant watering. And above all there was the sea, with ships on it coming and going, and assuring me of that which I had almost ceased to believe—namely that means did still exist of getting out of South America, and that some day I should be able to return chastened, but oh so infinitely wiser, to the heaven which is called England.

Whether it would be granted to me to do so this week or next, or next month, or next year—the terms are synonymous in South America—I could

not tell: and I had unfortunately only too much time to speculate; for I had arrived at six o'clock on a Sunday morning, and for twenty-four hours had nothing to do but wander about and wish that the Sabbath won even less recognition of the inhabitants than it appeared to. On Monday morning I was at a shipping-office before most of the community were awake; and when at last it opened I learned to my delight that there was quite a reasonable chance of getting away this week. All the ordinary boats, it was true, were full to bursting; but there was a small trading vessel coming south next day on which there might be a spare berth, and they would let me know '*mañana*' if I could have it. Until '*mañana*' arrived my experience was the reverse of that of Mary Rose in the play: I lived, that is, for at least twenty-five years fully conscious of the passage of every minute, and at the end of that time was astonished to find that no one seemed a day older. When the twenty-sixth at last arrived I went back to the shipping office —it was still there—and was told that the berth was mine: would I please be on the quay with my baggage not later than four o'clock? I would, you may be sure. And was. But was the boat there too? If you have come with me thus far you will hardly expect that. In point of fact four o'clock, five, six and seven had struck before there was any sign of smoke on the offing; and all this time, being afraid to go away, it was my lot to stand in the scorching sun on the tiny wooden quay, in the company of one or two fellow-passengers in the same plight as myself, and also in that of a multitude of native gentlemen whose staple industries seemed to be expectancy and expectoration. Soon after

eight the boat really did arrive ; we went on board, and I began to feel that I really was on the way to Valparaiso. But what would happen when I got there—that was the next worry. Would there be a train running over the Andes ? If there were, would there be any room in it for me ? If there were not, how long should I have to wait ? In vain had I tried to find out. People only knew that there had been a great deal of trouble on the line of late—floods, landslips and embankments giving way—and sometimes the train got through and sometimes it fell into the river. Trains being so few candidates for places were naturally too many ; and I might have to wait a week or even a month before I succeeded in getting a seat. I must hope for the best and expect—well, I knew by now what to expect in South America, and so do you.

The steamer was diminutive—German-owned, I fear, and partly German-manned. It reeked from end to end of cooking ; and the result was not more delectable in taste than in smell, though both were preferable to the company. The charge for all this—eleven pounds for three days and four nights—was also preposterous : and I was not comforted by the information that this was the regular fare on all the boats covering this route ; what may be justifiable on a big liner is sheer robbery on a cockle-shell. However, the trip was not unpleasant on the whole. The sun blazed ; the sea remained flat and exquisitely blue ; and we had some grand views of the Chilean coast here and there, wooded hills and occasionally tremendous cliffs. Moreover I was fortunate enough to be endowed with a marvellous gift of sleep—the result, I suppose, of descending to sea-level after some weeks at ten thousand feet—

and quite half the time, day as well as night, was blissfully unconscious of smells, Germans and scenery alike. If only one could prepare like that for every sea voyage !

Valparaiso harbour, which we reached early on Friday morning, has all the beauty of a huge sheet of water backed by steep hills. The hills are low and do not quite come to the water's edge, leaving a narrow strip of flat ground on which the railway station and the big business offices and warehouses are built. But they are so steep as to be practically cliffs ; and though houses manage to cling to them here and there, the way from the lower to the upper part of the town is for most people by lift (*ascenseur*), of which there are about a dozen scattered along the hill-side—and a good deal more than a dozen complaints per day. Both town and harbour are on a tremendous scale. The town creeps up and up the hill till you wonder if it will ever stop, and also for miles round the coast in either direction. To the north, some two miles away, lies Vina del Mar, the Brighton of Valparaiso, where most of the English colony have their houses—those, that is, who are lucky enough to get them ; but here as in England houses are very scarce and fantastically expensive. Here, or even in Valparaiso itself, if you are making money you can live as pleasantly as anywhere in the world outside England ; for the climate is absolutely ideal, never too hot and never cold ; there is acceptable society, both Chilean and English ; clubs provide you with cricket, polo and tennis ; and if you can do without sport, of which there is practically none on this coast, you have every ingredient for a healthy and happy existence. Money, however, you must have or

make; and plenty of it too, for expenses are much higher here than in England. At ordinary times everyone seems to make it; some in mines and nitrates, some in regular trade. But business in Chile is all very speculative; and a slump such as 1921 has seen is a far more serious thing there than in England; for the fluctuations of trade are far higher and lower, and partly as a cause, partly as a consequence, the Chilean 'dollar' has the most violent ebb and flow of any currency in the world. When I was there everyone seemed extraordinarily prosperous. Now in 1922 I am told commercial life is just a series of 'crashes.'

My instinct on arrival at this town being of the usual kind, I was in the office of the Transandine Railway very soon after landing, and to my delight and surprise was told that the route was actually open—after being more or less *interrumpido* for several weeks—and I could have one of the last remaining seats in the next train, starting two days later. I rejoiced, presented one or two introductions, was most kindly given the run of two English clubs, and saw the sights of Valparaiso. These, I found, might be counted on the fingers of one hand, and that by a man who had lost two fingers. Firstly the harbour, and secondly, the Stock Exchange. The former is always beautiful and interesting, with its waste of flashing water and crowd of ships of all nations; and the latter—well, I suppose there are stockbrokers in the world who can make the lily feel ashamed, but if so they do not live at Valparaiso. No, the Stock Exchange is not scenery—I wonder if it is in London. Anyhow, being debarred like all men of ordinary clay from visiting our own landscape, I took the opportunity

of visiting this one, and found it not uninteresting. With a permit I could take my place in a gallery overlooking the hall and there watch the process of buying and selling, which reminded me very much of an auction. On a sort of rostrum in the middle stood a clerk just like an auctioneer and constantly quoted prices. In front of him and to either side sat about a couple of hundred men listening; and occasionally a hand shot up and a voice barked out a word or two, followed perhaps by a dozen others and frantic excitement. No doubt there was some big dealing going on; for the Chileans are among the wildest gamblers in the world; and just then the huge price of tin had sent the principal mining shares soaring to heaven—or elsewhere—at any rate far above their real value, so that speculation was if possible more frantic than ever. But unfortunately I had not enough Spanish to know what was going on; and was only aware of shouting, excitement, and boys hurrying in and out with telegrams—altogether a thing interesting to have seen, but not a lasting delight.

I left Valparaiso two days later, feeling that despite its plainness and its noise and its lack of interesting features it was much the best town I had seen in South America as a place of residence. No doubt it lacks many of the advantages of Buenos Aires; but all these are to my mind made up for by the absence of extreme heat from its climate. In South America you have to resign yourself in any case to certain drawbacks—the heat, for example. But at Valparaiso there is no cause even to complain of this; and still less at Santiago, a few hours' journey inland, which is said by all who have seen it to be one of the most beautiful towns in South

America, and quite the most attractive to live in. There is too another advantage about residence in these Chilean towns; and that is that according to all the English opinion I met with it is far more possible to associate and even intermarry with the *Chilenos* than with any other people in South America. They are nearer to us in cleanliness, courtesy, honesty, efficiency, vigour, breeding than any other Latin-American race; and though it would be absurd to pass judgment on a nation after two days' experience of it, I feel that this account is probably correct, and that one may fairly accept it as final. At any rate there is far more social intercourse between the English and the Chileans than between English and Argentines, and therefore residence in Chile is for that reason alone pleasanter than elsewhere. In Brazil and Peru, I gather, this intercourse hardly exists; and in the other countries it is even more rare.

The efficiency of the race was at any rate apparent on the railway, which contrasted very favourably with anything of the kind in Bolivia. We had two engines, and despite an unrelenting series of gradients went at a splendid pace throughout our six hours' journey. The line wormed for a little way round the coast; then rose gradually among low hills, eucalyptus-trees and conifers to a country backed by mountains and very irregular, but cultivated wherever the hills and rocks allowed, and full of farms, houses, corn-fields, vineyards, mines here and there, now and then a small town, and all the signs of a thriving and prosperous community. *Apropos* of these vineyards, Chilean wine is very largely drunk in its own country, though not much outside it because there is hardly any to spare,

and if somewhat crude in flavour as compared with that of France and Germany, it is by no means to be despised. (Still less so are the liqueurs, which are all copies, to the very labels, of the European products, but owing to Government laxity can be forged *ad libitum* with impunity.) After leaving the vine-growing district we travelled for the remainder of the afternoon up a broad flat river valley whose formation had plainly been that of the valleys of Bolivia; but here the river had been kept in its place, comparatively speaking, for some generations, and almost every inch of the valley was cultivated. ('Comparatively' one must say, because the whole of this country west of the Andes is subject to tremendous floods in years of excessive snow.) There were huge fields of maize and corn; there were orange-trees, vines, peaches, figs, apples, all the fruits—and all Chilean fruits are for some reason of beautiful flavour, far better than anything in the Argentine. The sun blazed; the river roared beside us, very full still from the melting snow. Now and then we had a glimpse of dim blue mountains in the distance. Everywhere about us was the rich, tremendous foliage of the valley; and everywhere the impression of fertility, plenty and efficiency, a very pleasant change after the hills and deserts of Bolivia. Here certainly was one of the best things I had seen in South America, altogether a most stirring and exhilarating journey.

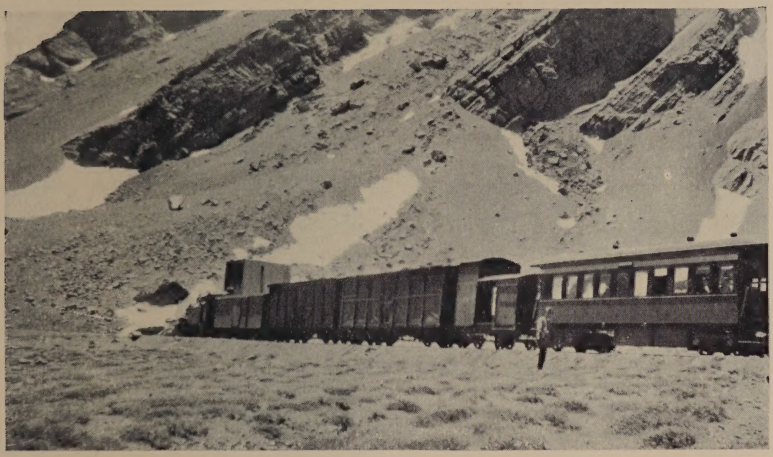
The end of it came at San Juan, a small town at the foot of the Andes, where passengers sleep before starting next day to cross the mountains. The mountain railway is a narrow-gauge affair, running from here to the point on the other side of the range to which the Buenos Aires and Pacific Railway has

been extended. And nominally there are two trains a week each way. But during the season of snow and for some time afterwards when it is melting the number is apt to be two a month or even less; for there are not only constant difficulties from snowdrifts, ice, landslips and collapsing embankments, but also the difficulties that come of dual control. The line is run by a joint-committee of the two nations concerned, Chile and the Argentine. These at the best of times have about as much love for each other as France and Germany; and the line is naturally a perpetual bone of jealousy and contention. Were it managed by either alone the natural difficulties might be overcome with comparative ease; but of course this cannot be thought of in a country like South America where the convenience of passengers is as nothing beside the dignity of nations; and so the dignity goes on and the trains do not. For my part I was lucky to be travelling when I was, just at the end of the melting season. For two or three weeks past the trains had been stopped or only got through with great difficulty, and only now were they beginning to run with any semblance of regularity. I was lucky too in another respect—namely, that I had been warned to come up from Valparaiso not by the ordinary '*Internacional*' train, which arrives at San Juan well after midnight, but by the afternoon train which allows plenty of time to dine and sleep before going on next day. I did dine and sleep excellently well; and when I saw the number of my fellow-passengers in the tiny hotel I was profoundly glad that I had had the warning. What became of those who came later I do not know. I suppose they slept on the floor.

o

There cannot be many places in the world where your train is brought to your door like a carriage and you have only to step in. But San Juan is one of them. At six o'clock next morning we all assembled in the garden at the back of the hotel; and presently along a line of rails which I had thought on the previous evening to be merely a relic of antiquity there appeared a miniature train of four carriages, upon which we advanced in mass formation. I was not the last of that mass; but on getting into one of the carriages found to my disgust that all the seats were numbered and already booked, that I ought to have booked one the night before, and that in view of the crowd of passengers I should be very lucky if I did not have to stand all the way. I searched that train in double-quick time, you may be sure. But it was only in the last compartment that I discovered a place, the last that was vacant; and even that I only secured by a short head. 'Runner-up,' I am pleased to add, was a German, who really did have to stand almost all the way.

From the moment we left that garden the gradient was of course perpetually against us, and with the exception of a few stops at stations the train was perpetually climbing till we left it seven hours later. Through semi-tropical scenery we went—trees, flowers, gardens, masses of foliage—to a river valley. This we followed, always rising higher and higher, till the foliage ceased and there was nothing but bare brown hills. The valley became a gorge; and our speed sank to about six miles an hour. We crossed the gorge at last and struggled up the other side of it, slower and yet slower, till we could hardly be said to move at all. We reached, or seemed to



Near the Summit, Trans-Andine Railway

Gate of a Cemetery in Argentina

reach, the top of the world; and it looked as if we must begin to go down; but behold, we dived into a tunnel, and when we came out the other side we were still climbing. More than once this happened, and more than once too I thought to myself, "Now we shall see one of the really magnificent views we have been promised." But more than once, to tell the plain truth, I was disappointed in this. The railway naturally chooses the tamest route it can find; the mountains visible, though not actually tame, are never anything extraordinary; the snow when I passed through had all gone; and the rivers were torrents of red mud. I do not know if it is because I have no soul or because I had been among mountains for some time past, but certain it is that I never experienced the thrill of seeing really big things which I had been led to expect. Nor do I think that anyone however new to it will find the way 'over the Andes' so exciting in fact as in idea.

About one o'clock mid-day we did at last struggle to the top; and after going a little way down on the other side arrived at the point where the Buenos Aires and Pacific train was waiting for us. There ensued a scramble, I cannot honestly call it a procession, to the *comedor*, in which I was not last: indeed, though I blush to confess it, I was one of those 'placed': but though I blush now I was proud and delighted then; and so perhaps will you be if you go that way and have had nothing to eat between 'rolls and coffee' at six A.M. and half-past one. Before long the train started; and we began to creep down the eastern side of the range, again not much quicker than we had come up. This for two reasons apparently: firstly the very steep gradient, and secondly the fact that the track clings almost all

the way to the bank of a river, and the embankments when that river is in flood are by no means too dependable. Time after time we had to go slower than a man's walk lest the strain should prove too much for them; and out of the windows we could see the earth crumbling away far beneath us into the roaring torrent below, and speculate what would happen to us if the bank did fail and the train toppled over. In one place a train had gone over a week or two before, and there were still a couple of carriages in the river. I am told they are still there (1922)—and presumably will be till the river disposes of them.

We steamed into Mendoza about eight o'clock that night, thus missing in the darkness a piece of country, mostly vineyards, which is said to be one of the most beautiful in the Argentine—it may easily be that. We changed once more, now into a main-line train of sleeping and restaurant carriages; and after that there was nothing more to do but to sleep that night and gaze all next day at the endless Argentine plain. We reached Buenos Aires about eight o'clock in the evening: and there once more I rejoined, not without relief on both sides, what had once been a Half; though, owing to the frightful heat in which she had been living, there appeared now to be no known fraction which would adequately describe her.

XXV

Now it befell, as it is apt to befall in and about South America, that the boat by which we were proposing to travel to England was not running precisely in accordance with its time-table. It was, in fact, so we were told at the shipping-office, at least a fortnight late and might be more. But when we expressed surprise and perhaps a little annoyance at this infection of an English line by a South American habit we found that our surprise was as nothing to that of the gentleman who gave us the information. Plainly in all his experience of South America he had never before known anyone notice the loss of a fortnight, much less make a fuss about it; and he made us feel indeed that apologies were due from us to him rather than from him to us. He did not get them. But then neither did we.

As usual we appealed to 'T.C.B.A.' for advice; and as usual—but I need not repeat the formula. Without a moment's hesitation he decided that we were to go to Mar del Plata, a sea-side place some eight hours' journey south of Buenos Aires, which is the Brighton, or rather the Trouville of the Argentine; and where we should at least be considerably cooler than we were at present, Buenos Aires being still most unpleasantly hot. With no more hesitation we obeyed; and then discovered that the Squeeze of all Squeezes was due there, if not already begun—namely, 'Carnaval,' the biggest *fiesta* of the year. The whole of the Argentine nation would be staying there, and most of the English colony,

and we should be lucky to get even a sofa to sleep on; the railway-company, for example, left whole trains of sleeping-carriages on the sidings during the great week, and every berth was always taken up. We did manage at length to get a tiny single room with two beds in it in a small English-managed hotel, price thirty-five shillings a head per day, board and lodging; a sufficient figure, you will probably think, and so did we; but we were told it was very moderate for Carnaval, most people paying two or three times as much, and we were very fortunate to find anything so reasonable. Reasonable or no we had to go; for the Half was still terribly limp after her roasting and I, according to her, in a condition even more contemptible.

Before going there perhaps you may like to hear how the Half had fared in my absence. The kindness of those who preside at La Corona is as invariable and all-pervading as the sun in a tropic land. But the control of that sun and of the elements generally is one of the things which they have not yet been able to achieve; and though during the greater part of the year the climate and the conditions of life there are as pleasant as anyone could wish, they are the first to acknowledge that during the summer months—December, January, February—the heat is apt to be terribly trying, and they to wish themselves anywhere but where they are. The Half unfortunately had struck the worst months in a very hot year. During the greater part of her time the conditions had not only been Plutonic—over 100° F. night and day for several weeks—but to my mind far worse than Plutonic; because when we meet, you and I, we may at least expect to find

the climate dry—5000° to 6000° F. could hardly be anything else—but here it was a damp, steamy, relaxing heat, in which plant life, insects, germs and microbes could flourish and multiply, but practically nothing else. The insects were indeed a terrible affliction; and the combination of the two became at times almost unendurable. Yet despite all this the Half had enjoyed her stay with a zest previously recorded only of little hills and young sheep; and she was indeed so good as to inform me that never in all her life had she enjoyed anything so much—a statement conveying no unctuous flattery to me, whose society she had been privileged to enjoy for the past fifteen years. Upon my entering a mild protest on this score I was told that neither the absence of a husband, nor his presence, nor any other drawback nor delight in the world can enter into the calculations of a woman who is permitted by Providence to spend nearly six months of her life *without once ordering dinner*. You may believe that or not as you please. I shan't. What is beyond doubt is that she was enormously better in spirits and outlook for her stay; the thorough change and the kindness of her hosts and hostesses more than making up for the tropical conditions, and giving her exactly what she needed after six years of war and post-war anxieties.

Nor had she remained throughout this time in the habitations of Pluto. For she had been asked by a most charming married couple, Mr and Mrs C., who had an *estañcia* some few miles away on the Aconquija Hills, to stay with them as long as she pleased; and this meant, at this time of year, picnicking in a little house which they had built on their *mesada* (high plateau) as a place of escape

from the heat and flies. So kind an invitation she had naturally accepted with delight; and in the course of a two days' ride found herself free from all these discomforts, with keen, brisk air, majestic views, snow mountains above her, wooded slopes and the plains below, and all around the wild life and gigantic spaces of the *estañcia*, many thousand acres of down and woodland.

Among these mountains the animal life was almost as plentiful as it had been scarce in the parts that I had visited; and some of it indeed might have been less plentiful with advantage. Now and then, for example, you might meet the *peccary* (wild pig), who introduces himself by ripping you up with his tusk; or the jaguar, locally called *tigre*, who appreciates a sirloin of beef quite as much as you do, and will take it without asking leave if he can get it without risk. There were very few of these; and as Mr C. had only cleared the trees on a small part of his *estañcia*—for he had only recently come there—he could not as yet render them fewer still, for he hardly ever saw them, and only knew of their presence by their tracks and the occasional loss of one of his beasts. Besides these two there were also *puma*, called lions by the natives; these preferred veal as a rule to beef. There were *guanaco*, an animal somewhat resembling the llama; Peruvian buck; a kind of deer something like our roe-deer; tiger-cats, wild cat (*gato di monte*), tapir, boa-constrictor and crab-eating foxes. Among birds there were condors, eagles, parrots, humming-birds in profusion, and innumerable others. There was also a profusion of trout in the rivers, which have been well stocked both here and elsewhere by the Argentine Government—can you ever account for

what it will or will not do? There were clouds of butterflies of dazzling colour and bewildering variety. There were seas of flowers, for none of which could the natives, though fond of them, ever produce a name. And not only were there the snow mountains to look at, a private range of Alps as it were; but on one of these mountains, easily within sight on a clear day, there were the remnants of an ancient village or fortress which had aroused a great deal of interest among antiquarians. To what race this village is to be attributed no one can tell at present. Mr C. and others had frequently visited it, but no one had as yet been able to spare the time, some two or three weeks, needed for a proper investigation of the site; and until a properly organised expedition can be sent it is unlikely that any definite theories will be formed on the subject.

If and when such an expedition goes, it will, we gathered, have to expect a good deal of *siroche*; for this is one of the places which are reckoned to be bad in that respect: and the inference is that the Indians who built there must have used it rather as a strategic position than a regular habitation; for though they do not often own to it they are almost if not quite as subject to mountain-sickness as anyone else; and it is very unlikely that they would have made their permanent abode at such an altitude unless they were forced to. Probably, like the Ancient Britons, they needed now and then a comparatively fortified village to retire to when their enemies were about, and there took their families and beasts till the danger was over.

Even the animals in a case like this had to be considered, for they are by no means unaffected by

altitude. In his admirable work, *Climbing and Exploration in the Bolivian Andes*, Sir Martin Conway speaks at some length of its effects on horses and mules. The former, especially race-horses, seem to be exceedingly sensitive to lack of oxygen. And the latter, in his experience, felt it at little more than 12,000 feet. For when climbing the lower slopes of Slimani he says, "The mules soon gave evidence of suffering from the thinness of the air; they halted at frequent intervals, and all behaved alike, taking several short, quick breaths in rapid succession, then three or four slow, deep ones; after which they were ready to go on again." (This was up a steep slope.) And elsewhere he observes: "I have not myself seen horse or mule capable of carrying a man over easy ground at a higher altitude than about 16,500 feet, where they almost uniformly break down." Personally, I never saw a mule affected in any way in Bolivia, and I was at 10,000 to 12,000 feet all the time, and at 15,000 for a good part of it. But I heard of their failing more than once from people who knew the country well, and particularly of places called by the natives *tembladera*, where without warning or any obvious reason (even that of annoying you) your mule will suddenly throw up his arms as it were, fall on his side, and collapse without effort or explanation stone dead. If this happens on a mountain path the effects are apt to be inconvenient. But no one can tell when or where it will happen. As in the case of *siroche*, there are places which are held to be bad in this respect and others which are not; and though there are one or two theories about it, as for example that it may be due to poisonous grass or herbs which the beasts find in some places but not in others, or to gaseous

emanations from the ground affecting their breathing, no one has yet produced a satisfactory explanation. Human beings are not affected by it; nor is there any evidence of *siroche* in the same places; so there is nothing to help us. Why it should not be ordinary heart-failure one does not quite see.

Amid these enchanting conditions then the Half remained for some time, picnicking most joyfully with her host and hostess. On the way back to Buenos Aires she spent a few more days at La Corona: and there awaiting her she found three or four telegrams from me; all of which she knew must be important, relating as they would be to our arrangements for sailing, but from none of which, owing to their mutilation by the operators, could she extract a word of sense. The entire intellect of the English colony was directed singly or in heated debate to solving these problems, but in hardly any instance could they provide even a plausible solution. In one case, for example, I had telegraphed: "The *Andes* sails on such-and-such a date. Arrange if possible for us both to stay with the B.'s before we go." But all were agreed—for once—that the delivered message must mean, "Before leaving the factory wait for Gibson, who will come there from Antofogasta," and a little more. In vain did the Half protest that I should never use the word 'factory'; that she had never heard of anyone called Gibson in South America, and that even if she had it was quite incredible that at that date I should ask her to wait for anyone. That, said everybody, was what the Spanish words conveyed; and they could not be construed into anything else. (It was not my Spanish, I hasten to add, but Roger's which is as good as anyone's.)

There was no time to get the messages repeated, for they took three days each way even when marked 'Urgente'—what is a 'Non-urgente,' one wonders? And even if there had been they would probably have come back quite as mutilated as before, but in a different way. All that the Half could do was to assume that I intended, as I had once suggested in a letter, to go back to Buenos Aires by Antofogasta and the Transandine; and to act according to this theory, which was fortunately correct.

To Buenos Aires then she repaired, with only the dimmest idea when I should get there and, as it proved, with more luck than at one time seemed to be in store for her. For there was trouble on the railway as usual. Twenty-four hours before she was due to start an entire carriage was wrecked by a bomb; there were various 'incidents' like loosening rails on the track; and a good deal of uncertainty as to whether trains would run or not. As it happened they did. She hit on another lady travelling by the same train; which was again great luck, for as you may remember it is not too pleasant for an English lady to travel alone in the Argentine; and got through the journey without incident. Also, by more luck than management, she did not have to remain at Buenos Aires more than three days before I arrived.

XXVI

Mar del Plata we found to be about the equal in beauty of such places in England as Folkestone, Seaford or Ramsgate—a mass of hideous houses, that is, scattered over a bald stretch of coast, some cliff, some flat, all very plain, but relieved here and there as you went inland by a profusion of trees; more trees indeed than we had seen throughout the Argentine, except in the sugar belt.

The town consists mainly of villas and hotels: every rich Argentine regards it as a point of honour to have a villa here, though he may very seldom use it; and the hotels are of great size and great number. All along the flat part of the shore there is a sort of esplanade or terrace known as the *Rambla* (*del Sud*), backed by a big colonnade which, following the curve of the bay, is certainly rather effective—as rows of pillars always are, whatever their age and substance. This colonnade consists of clubs, bathing-places, restaurants and shops, the latter offering the choicest clothes, jewellery and fancy goods that Paris and London can produce. It is partly under cover, partly open; and it is of course the centre of the place's life. Near it is a gigantic and florescent club-house, where the florescent Argentine lunches and dines, and gambles and listens to the band. A little farther north there is a long pier used mainly as a depository for fishing-boats; for owing to the heavy seas and the absence of any shelter these when not in use have to be hoisted out of the water by crane. And farther

north still there is another *Rambla* (*del Norte*), a much more humble affair of wood and glass, where the poor and unflorescent presume to meet each other, bathe and dine. (It is only a person of brazen courage who would dare to whisper that such people exist at Mar del Plata.) Some two miles to the south there is a golf-links, of excellent quality, though rather short, to which you go by horse-drawn tram. And that is about all there is to say of the place as a whole.

Our hotel proved to be near this humbler *Rambla*; and a very great advantage we found this to be when we had taken our bearings. For apart from the absence of the florescent—in itself a boon—this proved to be the only part of the town where one could escape easily from streets and people and get to comparatively unfrequented spots on cliff and shore. At the seaside, to my mind, one wants to live like an animal, eating, sleeping, basking and bathing and little else. We did this with the more delight for being quite unfit for anything else on our arrival; and we came to the conclusion that nowhere in the world just then could we have found more perfect conditions for the purpose. The sun gave us all the heat we wanted and seldom too much. The air seemed to dance as we breathed it. The sea shone, blue and beckoning, to the limit of our sight. We had nothing to do or think about but bathe and stroll and eat and sleep. And we did sleep, and we did eat, I should be afraid to say how much, principally of the majestic prawns which swarm into this noble bay. Prawns in fact such as you, my dear sir or madam, hardly ever see or hear of in the dull waters of England. Even the smallest were as big as those which in our fishmongers' shops are set

apart like royalty on a dais to themselves. And the larger—but I fear almost to tell you of the larger. They were large as sprats; yea, their dear bodies alone, apart from any side-trappings of claws and feelers. And their flavour—oh the pride and the joy of life that a prawn must know before he can taste like that! Perhaps the parents were not quite so sprightly to the tongue as their children, for 'whom the gods love die young.' But whatever their age both were perfect of their kind; and they must certainly be reckoned among the things that make men believe in a Benevolent Creator.

Bathing at Mar del Plata, when you knew the ropes, was a luscious experience. I do not mean the real ropes; which stretched on stakes ran some forty yards out into the sea at intervals all along the shore, and on calm days were the refuge of hundreds of non-swimmers, while on rough even the skilled were glad of them so big was the surf. No, it is the ropes of metaphor that I refer to; things of far more importance, at any rate to me. On the morning of our arrival, thinking no evil, I plunged into the South Atlantic clad in a strange garment of pink and red stripes which I had had by me for some time, and had brought all the way from England on the chance that it might be needed or—still better—mislaid. Perhaps it fitted a little closely—most 'bathing-rags' do—but certainly it covered almost every inch of my person from neck to knee; and it was in my opinion the last possible concession to Mrs Grundy, and beyond the cavil even of her disgusting mind. No sooner, however, was I in the water than a roar went up from the *Rambla* beside which the roar of the waves was as nothing; and looking back I beheld as though the whole sea-front

were one angry face and bellow, the faces and the bellows in reality of half-a-dozen swarthy bathing-men whose attitude suggested that I had robbed a bank, murdered the Prime Minister or, still worse, defrauded one of them of a *peso*. Of course I took no notice, merely smiled at them, waved my hand and went on swimming: for plainly whatever their wrath the shallowest stretch of cold water would hinder them from following me, and whatever the nature of my offence I should be a great fool not to finish my bathe. I did; then returned to my hut; and there, assailed by a flow of Spanish which I did not understand and a whirl of gestures and bathing-costumes which I did, I gathered that my costume was such a stain upon public decency as had never before been witnessed at Mar del Plata and could not possibly be allowed to happen again. From them and later from our English-speaking landlady I learned that in the Argentine the human frame is considered so foul a thing that for mixed bathing even a man must drape it loosely and plentifully with black or dark blue before he appears in public; a great loose tunic, that is, reaching from the shoulder nearly to the knees, in addition to that other garment—not a kilt—which in my young days was—or were—considered sufficient for all purposes. My garment, with its pinkish hue, was evidently regarded as the most serious outbreak of Sin which had happened at this place for many years; and it was, I gathered, only because I was English and therefore mad that I had escaped being hauled off to a magistrate and possibly condemned to many years of solitary confinement.

This was a grave blow; for bathing in clothes is to my mind worse than not bathing at all. Here

we had everything that could make a bathe perfect: a grilling sun; a cool rough sea; a sandy beach, so hot where it was dry that you had to run, could not stand on it for a moment; and besides a warm, gentle wind the joy of being at Mar del Plata instead of in 'England now that April's there.' But of what use was all this if both in and out of the sea one must be clothed and hooded like a monk in folds of clammy serge, which clung leech-like to the frame and prevented all that play of sun and wind which is perhaps the best part of a bathe? As well be a woman at once—poor, hapless creatures! However, there was a way round, and I soon found it. The regulation hours for bathing seemed to be between ten and twelve. After that the entire community betook itself to *almuezo* (breakfast); and then, or often earlier, I would emerge from my hut in all the panoply of tunic and etceteras; walk two or three hundred yards along the shore till I felt that no Grundies, male or female, were likely to pursue me with their evil eyes; and then throw to the winds that which the Law so strenuously demanded. During the fortnight we were there I doubt if my tunic was wet more than twice. And yet the Argentine Republic is still a going concern!

There was no such escape for the wicked at the *Rambla del Sud*. There if you bathed at all you must bathe in full view of everybody, in full funereal garb, and amidst such throngs of men, women and children as made it well-nigh impossible to see the sea at all. The entire nation seemed to take the water between ten and twelve; and thereafter strolled up and down the esplanade in full panoply of dress, displaying itself to the admiration of all beholders. Certainly from a woman's point

of view this was a very wonderful sight. Here at the height of the season you saw the very best that the wealth of the country, the genius of Paris and the faultless taste of the people could produce. Every woman was wonderfully clad ; every woman seemed to make the most of her appearance and figure —though, as has been said, the latter would have to be divided by two to suit our English ideas —and every one of them, however portly, seemed to carry herself with a grace and dignity which we hardly know in England. Backwards and forwards they strolled, a lovely parade of master-pieces ; and the Half would spend morning after morning sitting there and gazing at the pageant. One morning was enough for me. But it is a spectacle which, being in the Argentine at the moment, one should not miss; their standard of dress, taking the nation as a whole, being certainly a good deal higher than ours, and probably the highest in the world.

On the two or three days of Carnaval itself the nation seemed to return to the mental condition of infancy and did not impress. Not only children but grown-up people of all classes strolled about, squirting each other with water and scent, or shying at each other little rolls of paper which unwound as they flew through the air and enveloped everyone in bonds of flimsy colour. It mattered little whether you were a stranger or not, you were apt to be bombarded just the same. Going along calmly in a tram, you would suddenly see something hurtle through the air and find yourself soaked to the skin with a paper bag full of water. The children naturally were accorded full licence; and clad in fancy costumes and armed with squirts and other offensive implements, did not fail to make

the most of it. But it was a little disconcerting to the English mind to see, for example, at the rooms of the principal yacht club of the place a serried army of grey-headed gentlemen, all garbed as though to sail upon the sea, spending their entire morning throwing little missiles of paper at their friends as they passed up and down the Rambla. One could not help transferring the scene in imagination to the R.Y.S. at Cowes in the days of King Edward VII. and wondering—exactly—what he would have said.

Mar del Plata soon began to pall; but the effect of its air—or prawns—on our bodily condition was such that we could easily have put up with a little more of it; for it was here first, practically since leaving England, that we regained real fitness and were free of the effects of either illness, tropical heat or disgusting food. The Argentine in summer is not to be recommended as a health resort. No doubt it does very well for men who are leading active lives, though even they did not look the better for the heat; but it seems to be very trying for women and children. At any rate, except at Mar del Plata, we seldom saw any of the latter looking as fit as they ought to, and the women appear to grow faded and worn very much sooner than they would in England. This place must be the salvation and re-creation of hundreds of people who are never otherwise at their best.

XXVII

This is the last lap.

Even the process of getting out of South America, we found, was not without its worries. The whole scheme of the R.M.S.P. Co.'s sailings had just been upset by the fact that on her outward voyage one of their two biggest boats had been put in quarantine at Rio Janeiro for more than a fortnight. The ostensible reason for this was, I believe, the presence of a mild case of influenza on board: but the real reason, so far as I could gather, was that one of the line's officials was said to have affronted the Brazilian Government's doctor: anyhow the result was that three passengers died from the heat while the ship was in quarantine, and so Brazilian honour was satisfied.

The second of the two big boats, undetained, thus reached Buenos Aires only two days later than the first; and a rather smaller one arriving next day there were thus three big steamers in the dock at the same time. The agitators chose this moment for a dock strike, which threatened to stop the movement of these as of all other ships. And there was at the same time a strike of taxi-drivers, which, though a trifle in itself, was not without its terrors for strangers like ourselves, who knew no other means of getting to our ship. The nation thus managed to combine a threat of indefinite delay to our departure with a powerful discouragement of our return. And as though even this were not enough it gave us finally, by its pride of purse, a

kick which kept us sore and resentful long after we had left its shores. In London or Liverpool the cost of our two passages would have been about £220. In Argentina it was £325, a calamity due entirely to the odious prosperity of that country and the chaotic weakness of our own sovereign. 'Exchange is no robbery?' I do not think.

As a matter of fact the dock strike was the only obstacle likely to prove serious. You never know in Buenos Aires how that will turn out. It may lead to a general strike of all labour throughout the country, which is the nightly dream of every agitator as he lays his weary head upon the pillow; or it may lead to murder, arson, loot and general rebellion, which even in his dreams he hardly dares to hope for. As a rule it smoulders for a while, keeping the country on pins and needles as to the outcome; then either sputters out unsuccessful, or continues for weeks together, bringing almost all shipping traffic to an end. In this case the movement smouldered half-successful for some days before our departure and duly provided us with our share of pins and needles; but fortunately it did not burst into full flame till a day or two after we had gone, and it was only at Rio some days later that we heard of its success and of the general paralysis of shipping which it had caused.

I am afraid that no tears bedimmed my eyes as we crept down the estuary on our way home. Indeed I incline to think that in the eyes of any well-regulated Briton one of the best moments in a trip to South America is that in which he leaves the uncertainties of that chaotic land, with its strikes, floods and utter indifference to time, for the well-scrubbed decks of an English liner and the certainty

that but for ' act of God ' he will be deposited in England within the time appointed. If anyone tells me that this is a very insular point of view, and further, that my whole account of our journey is the most insular thing that has ever been put on paper, then I say I most cordially agree with him. Insular I am and propose to remain. For the longer I live and the more I see of other nations the more I am persuaded that England is the only country in the world and the English and Scotch the only people. Time after time, both in war and in peace, the thing is proved. Loathsome as we are in many respects, and easily as other nations may beat us in some, I defy the world to produce anything like our combination of character and capacity. For generosity, courage, readiness, business honesty, treatment of women, charity, sense of duty, honour, humour, cleanliness, cheerfulness, capability, the high mind and level head, all the tests by which a nation can be judged, where in the world will you find men like ours, or still more emphatically women ? One must go abroad a good deal to become really insular. That is the conclusion which travel inevitably drives home.

The ship was enormous; and very empty, both of cargo and passengers. The almost simultaneous departure of three boats had of course divided the goods awaiting shipment: like Gaul, into three parts; and the crowd of rich Argentines who usually flock to Europe at this time of year had been almost stopped for once by rumours of serious influenza in England and France, a risk they could not bring themselves to face. In itself the sparsity of population on ship is a sweet and pleasant thing; and this time it was rendered sweeter to us, who had

paid so huge a sum for our berths, by the news that the trip would certainly be a 'loser' for the Company; indeed the big two ships on this route hardly ever pay their way. After having so much money dragged out of us by the combined machinations of the Argentine Republic and the Company, this did something to heal the wound, though not enough. Those who told us, as many did, "Ah, in the old days we used to pay £30 each way, or something like £50 for the round trip," never knew how near they came to death.

Santos, at which we called and stayed for half-a-day, is the port of San Paulo; a very big, busy and prosperous town a few miles inland, and the centre of an immense trade in coffee all of which is exported here. As our boat crept slowly up the estuary at dawn we thought it by far the most lovely place we had seen in South America, more effective even than Rio, though not on so grand a scale. On either side of us were great flats of dazzling green, backed by a few small hills. There in front of us was the white town splashed with the deeper green of trees; and immediately behind that a great range of pink and purple shapes that might be cloud and might be mountain, and which, as the light grew clearer, revealed themselves as mountains. Far into the distance we could see them, powerful, jagged, dramatic forms: and never shall we forget how they looked that morning, the blush of colour on their sides, the wisps of cloud that lingered about them, the rosy, hectic dimness of the dawn, and then the blaze of the swiftly rising sun.

Santos provides a wonderful instance of the conquest of fever. In old days, so powerful was 'Yellow Jack,' a voyage to this port meant almost certainly

a voyage to another. Ships would arrive and begin unloading; in a few days every man on board would be dead. Perhaps the owners would try to find a relief crew to send out and bring their vessel back; perhaps fail, for hardly anyone who knew the risk would face it; or perhaps succeed—and if they succeeded lose the new crew at once like the old, and have to leave the ship and cargo to rot to pieces on the river bank. Year after year this went on. Men died as natives die in a hot country from cholera. Sierra Leone was a health resort in comparison. And then at last the place became so important that the question had to be tackled in earnest; and it was, and solved without the least difficulty. All through the flats and marshes in and about the town great trenches were dug and concreted, through which the sea could flow with each incoming tide. The mosquitoes, unable to face salt water, had to evacuate; and the town became and is as healthy as in such a baking climate any town is ever likely to be.

After Santos, Rio again. This time we stopped for two days owing to coaling difficulties, and that in grilling heat. We ascended Corcovado once more; and had the luck to be at the top during the only ten minutes of the day when it was not enveloped in cloud. We went a motor journey among the hills to a place named Tijuca and saw some very wonderful tropical scenery. We melted, and were told for once that this really was hot—Rio was seldom worse. But alas, when we left it it was no longer on an empty ship. About a hundred Brazilians had come on board; all first-class in their possession of this world's goods, but not alas in their regard for that which comes next to godliness.

Portentously rich, unloved of any—least of all by their Argentine neighbours—they filled our hitherto uncrowded decks; possessed our favourite corners; let loose a swarm of noisy, dirty children who ran uncontrolled about the ship; and failed in any way to kindle enthusiasm for the cause of Universal Brotherhood. I have always maintained that you have only to bring any two nations of the world into really close and continuous contact to breed in them an ineradicable hostility; and certainly if England and Brazil took many sea-voyages together they would very soon be at war. In this case I am sorry to say that they had quite as good reason to dislike us as we them. For amongst the small and, for the most part, very pleasant English-speaking contingent on board was a set of rowdies—not only male—whose drunkenness and whose behaviour generally must have given them the worst possible impression of our national tone and manners. The British 'bounder,' in fact, in all his glory. And this too before Latin-Americans, who whatever their faults are before all things dignified and courteous. The decent English on board could hardly have had a more humiliating experience.

Cape Verde Islands, Madeira, Lisbon—what is there to be said of these? Nothing new, certainly. At Madeira one is struck, especially after visiting South America, by the relative cheapness of living there—fifteen shillings a day at a good English hotel—as also by the amazing beauty of the flowers. The cheapness and good construction of the local basket-work are also a notable feature. And it is here, if a man possesses a wife, that he may see her in a basket-shop making up her mind—probably with the aid of her fingers—how many baskets she

is likely to want per annum in the course of an average life; and for the rest of that voyage he may make up his mind that his dressing will have to be done in the bathroom, for there certainly will be no room for him in his cabin.

Lisbon very nearly proved the end of our voyage; for going ashore there we made a mistake as to the difference between European and ship's time, and when we came to the quay to go off by launch to our ship—which was, as usual, anchored far out in the middle of the Tagus—we found no launch, and realised that the ship must be on the point of departure. That was the moment for the local boatman to teach Shylock how to conduct his business; and he did not fail to make some brilliant experiments, especially when he discovered that his victims knew little about Portuguese currency and still less about the language. Even then, however, we were struck by the absence of any real competition. On our refusing the more outrageous offers, for example, we found that they merely shrugged their shoulders and abandoned the contest; and we were driven to the conclusion that their Latin minds were simply incapable of realising the importance an Englishman might attach to getting to a place within a certain time, say a month or a year. At any rate they showed no disposition to bid against each other: and we were very lucky to hit almost at once on two comparatively honest ruffians, who did not suggest more than treble the ordinary figures and were soon persuaded to accept double. In a moment they had their boat launched and sail up; they rowed hard as well as sailed; and till we had covered a third of our journey there seemed to be some hope of success. Then, however,

our ship actually began to move; and black despair descended upon us, for if it did not stop there was little chance of our leaving Lisbon for some days. Not only were the railways closed owing to a strike, but the Civil Service (including postal and telegraph employees) were also taking a holiday of the same kind; and to the best of my belief all the banks as well. We stood up and yelled, and waved conspicuous garments; but the ship kept on gliding away from us slowly but only too steadily: and as a matter of fact, so we afterwards heard, no one on board ever saw or heard us at this stage; we did not exist. What did exist fortunately, though we did not know it, was another party of laggards who were in the same boat as ourselves, figuratively speaking though not actually. They had left the quay a little before we did; and being nearer the ship their yells and apparel did at length attract the attention of the officer in charge, and he slowed down to give them a chance, though it was impossible in that racing tide to stop the ship altogether. As we drew nearer and beheld the decks black with people we knew that we too must have been observed and had a chance if anyone had; but it was still touch-and-go whether we should manage to get on board; and we were told afterwards that the crowd were almost delirious with excitement—should we or should we not be 'left'? Even when we drew alongside the chances seemed to be against us; for the only way of getting aboard was for our men to row faster than the ship was going till we were well forward of the companion-ladder, then stop, and as the steamer rushed past us—or seemed to—clutch at the ladder with a boat-hook. Twice they failed at this—it was by no means easy—and twice we

flew back into the wash of the screw, which despite the slow speed was very 'popply.' Each time there was desperate work rowing us back again to the companion-ladder; and we began to think that after all we should never get aboard. However, at the third try one of the men managed to snatch a hold upon something, and with a great effort to keep it; and we hurried aboard, ladling out all the Portuguese money we could find for our boatmen, because to their eternal honour—and our eternal surprise—they had never even suggested our giving them anything extra. How many half-crowns changed hands over us on the first-class deck I should be sorry to say. One expression from a lady of Ecuador who had made great friends with the Half was quite the biggest compliment that she—or her long-suffering husband—had ever received or ever expects to: "When I hear it was you I tink I fall down dead"!

That is all. We reached Southampton without incident; and you will be glad to hear that the Half is now ordering dinners quite contentedly; and I —am eating them.

FINIS

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